The Role of the Press in Maintaining

Social Ideology

A Thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

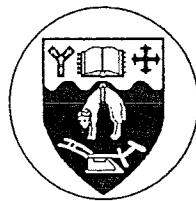of

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For Roger and Gerry.

Thanks to Jim and Mary.

Contents

Abstract

The press perform a crucial role in facilitating the social, economic and political spheres which combine to bind society together. This thesis looks at the relationship between the press and ideology. It provides an account of the way ideology works through the press to influence the community and asserts that the role of the press is fundamental to the maintenance of social ideology. The thesis discusses the Marxist view of the role of the press in society, and the arguments which support this perspective - false consciousness, cognitive schema theory, symbolism and ritual, and concentration of ownership. Concentration of ownership creates conditions which define the content of the press by influencing newspaper structures, the role of sources and the role of public relations. This discussion is supported by a study which assesses qualitatively and quantitatively the values of corporate representation in the press. This reveals a significant correlation between the interests of corporations and the content of the press.

Chapter One

Introduction

The media has developed to become a fundamental organisation, and pillar of, society. It works to bind together members of the community and plays a crucial role in facilitating the social, economic and political spheres which together constitute society. The media has evolved into a primary agency through which members of society are educated and informed. The status which the media has obtained therefore necessitates an investigation of the values and perspectives manifested in the tone and character of the information with which it informs, educates and entertains the community. This process can contribute to a holistic evaluation of the role the press perform in our world.

The media assault each of us in an all-encompassing cacophony of information - the daily newspaper in the mailbox, the community newspaper left on a cafe table, the radio station which backgrounds each purchase we make, and the seemingly incessant multiplication of television channels. It is through the information these mediums provide that we are able to participate in the world we live in. In tomorrows newspaper I will learn which politician has most recently acted most brilliantly - or ineptly - which business won an award for innovation - or vanished - and which people are being applauded for their actions - or jailed. The power this information holds in the community to form public opinion and influence the community raises

questions as to the nature of this information - what it represents and where it comes from.

This thesis therefore looks at the relationship between the press and ideology. Specifically, the role of the press in forming and maintaining social ideology. It aims to bring together various strands of political, psychological and media theory to provide an account of the way ideology works through the press to influence the community. In this way it works to provide an application of these theories to a New Zealand context and add to an understanding of how the press works within our society.

This thesis asserts the hypothesis that the press is fundamental to the formation and maintenance of social ideology. In examining this hypothesis the communications of two corporate organisations was evaluated. The question posed in this evaluation of the media is; what is the correlation between the interests of the dominant companies as they would wish themselves to be represented in the media and the actual content of the media.

This thesis addresses the inadequacy that presently exists in the area of research which may broadly be termed public relations[1]. Murdoch and Goulding state that there is a need for further study of the implications of market forces. Research can be improved by examining linkages between the work situation and the market situation as

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[1] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). *Mass Communication and Society.* Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd. London. 1977. P. 34

resources effect the manner in which organisations function. This thesis approaches this requirement by defining the dominant ideology and the assumptions on which it is founded shows how these functions are manifested in the community; and examines the processes and procedures of the media and their links to the general ideological framework.

While the general notion that organisations use the media to influence the public is commonly understood and accepted there is a surprising lack of a specific body of research and data. The data and research of this thesis aims to contribute to the development of this minimal body of research. The case-study provides concrete data of the success of a dominant group in using the media to express it's views while the concept of ideology has been linked with a broad range of theory.

The original contribution of this study centres on the case-study and the extensive way in which press release and press article content were evaluated. There is little data of this type available in New Zealand and this provides an in-depth analysis of how successful two prominent organisations have been with their use of press releases. The research of this thesis represents a holistic perspective in which how one element of the communal system functions is considered to relate to all other aspects of the system. It therefore draws on a range of research drawn from different disciplines such as politics, psychology and media theory.

The evaluation of the role of the press in forming and maintaining social ideology has inherent limitations. In particular, the date exhibited in the study should be considered

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in context. Principally this is because of the limited size of the sample - the results should therefore be considered in the context of this study but not considered as representative of any trends on a more general level. It may be that the findings are applicable in a wider context but it has not been exhibited or proved on this occasion.

There is a lack of research in this area of study. There is an array of research concerning the role of the media but there is a lack of study on the specific public relations function as performed by companies - it is an area of interest which has yet to develop it's own specific body of work. The advantage of this, was that the thesis was able to look at a range of theories and pull them together in an interesting manner.

This thesis has utilised a diverse range of theory and arranged them in a complementary way. I also spoke to representatives of corporate organisations, members of the public relations profession and surveyed newspaper editors and reporters. I then performed a case-study to establish the validity of my conclusions.

This thesis shows that a fundamental role of the press is to maintain social ideology through the propagation of information which adheres to the beliefs of the dominant ideology. The argument outlined in this thesis and the case-study illustrate this role as performed by the press. The fundamental implication for the community is that it should be aware of this function and factor it into their consideration of events and activities as portrayed by the press.

This argument is founded by chapter two which discusses the role of the press within the Marxist tradition and details the growth and development of arguments which have contributed to the Marxist view. Supporting arguments which support this consideration of the press are considered in chapter three where the press is defined as an ideological state apparatus. It also backgrounds the development of the press as part of the New Zealand social fabric, examines the patters of press ownership, and applies an alternative interpretation to the social responsibility model.

Chapter four assesses the arguments which develop the concept of ideology. In particular it examines the Marxist concept of ideology and the notion of false consciousness, cognitive schema theory, symbolism and ritual, and the implications of the media's concentration of ownership in society. The influence of market conditionsis evaluated in chapter five. It also discusses the presses concentration of ownership in New Zealand, internal newspaper structures and its bureaucracy and conventions of newsworthiness, the role of sources in the press, the place of alternative sources in the press, and the role of public relations.

Chapter six substantiates the earlier arguments and details findings the findings of the case stunt which evaluates the characteristics of the communication corporate organisations are able to achieve with their publics through the press. These arguments are brought together in chapter seven and the findings of the case study are discussed. This argues the press perform a valuable role in society with the implication that the public is largely unaware of the validity of its content and that if the press is really to inform the public then a more holistic content is necessary.

CHAPTER TWO

Marxism and the role of the media

This chapter examines socialised frameworks of belief. It considers the Marxist

position and its use of ideology to explain how society comes to consist of individuals

who have a compatible framework of belief which allows them to live together.

2.1 A Marxist perspective

Trends in the study and theory of the media have reflected trends in social theory. The

history of media theory has been tied to the history of Marxism. At times Marxist

analysis has dominated considerations of the media while for periods Marxism has

been eclipsed by empirical theory. The two schools of theory have been considered to

represent opposing poles of the theoretical spectrum but can be combined to provide a

more powerful analysis than either can provide independently.

2.2 Ideology

A Marxist interpretation of society explains the role of culture and the press by using

the notion of 'ideology.' The reference point for any discussion concerning Marx and

the media is an often cited quotation, written in 'The German Ideology' in 1859, that

provides the foundation for subsequent Marxist discussions. It states,

'The class which has the means of material production at its disposal

has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so

that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means

of production are subject to it ... In so far, therefore, as they rule as a

class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self

evident that they ... among other things ... regulate the production and

distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling

ideas of the epoch. [2]'

In this quotation Marx is making three statements which are relevant to a

consideration of the media's role in contributing to culture. First, the owners of capital

have control of the media and are able to define its production and distribution of

ideas. Second, control of the media enables the owners of capital to have views which

dominate subordinate groups. Third, this ideological domination maintains inequities

in society and so perpetuate the status quo[3].

In another quote in the preface to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political

Economy' in 1859 Marx wrote:

'In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into

definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations

of production ... the totality of these relations of production constitutes

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[2] Marx, K. *Early Writings*. (ed. Colletti, L). Penguin. Hammondsworth. 1975

[3] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M, & Woolacott, J. (Eds). *Mass Communication and Society*. 1977. P. 15.

the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises

a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definate

forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life

conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life[4].'

This quotation emphasises that the system of capitalist control over the production and

distribution of ideas is embedded in and conditioned by the fundamental dynamics

which underpin an economy. Control of the economic system facilitates control of the

cultural superstructure as agents of social, political, and intellectual life, such as the

media, assert an ideology which affirms the individuals role in terms of the relations

of production. The degree of social consciousness to which the individual has access

is therefore a product of their position in the economic system.

The first concerted attempts by Marxists to apply the notion of ideology to the issues

of the media in society came in 1923 with the founding of the Institute for Social

Research in Frankfurt. It's theorists included Theodor Adoro, Herbert Marcuse and

Max Horkheimer, whose collective thoughts came to be known as the 'Frankfurt

School.' Its members' perspective was shaped by three factors: disappointment the

Russian Revolution had not spread to Western Europe; the rise and fall of fascism;

and frustration at the post-war stability of the Western World. The Frankfurt School

considered that the consciousness of the need for change had been eliminated by an

'ideological climate in which the prospect of a horizon beyond the limits constituted

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[4] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M, & Woolacott, J. (Eds). *Mass Communication and Society.* 1977. P. 16.

by the present had been virtually lobotomised.[5] It attempted, therefore, to explain

why the impetus for radical social change had subsided and focused its attention on

advanced capitalist states with a non-fascist but nonetheless manipulative popular

culture.

The Frankfurt School considered that ideology was the mechanism that defined the

conception of the world within which individuals conducted their lives. As capitalist

production has expanded the logic which sustains it has come to progressively depend

on the increasing 'socialisation' or independence of labour. Ideology enables

capitalism to expand by establishing a public consciousness in which socially

interdependent labour appears as a set of mutually independent and indifferent

relations, and by creating a whole set of theories, images, representations and

discourses which fill it out. The underpinning system of capital provides the

foundation for the market and the market society and the ideology to create a complex

sphere of legal, political, economic and philosophical discourses which define the

conception of modern capitalist society.[6]

The approach of the Frankfurt School was overtaken by an American empiricist

paradigm that focused on behavioural change and used an empirical model of power

[5] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T, Curran J. & Wollacott, J. (Eds). *Culture, Society and the Media.* Methuen & Co, Ltd. London. 1982. P.43.

[6] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T, Curran J. & Wollacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 324.

and influence.[7] The empiricist approach addressed the inability of the Marxist approaches to provide evidence of the processes it describes by focusing on decision making and the ability of 'A' to directly influence the behaviour of 'B'. Theorists from the empirical perspective considered that in society a broadly-based consensus of norms were agreed upon and prevailed throughout the population. In this conception of society the media were seen as largely reflective and expressive of an achieved consensus as it underwrote pluralism by functioning in line with the core value system of society. Empirical theorists conducted studies which supported their assertions that the media was unable to significantly influence the public concerning social events, such as elections.

The pluralist position prospered until the late 1960s when civil unrest and disobedience created doubts about the validity of a pluralist society. The resulting enforcement of social control raised questions as to whether consensus could spontaneously arise or whether it was the result of a complex process of social construction and legitimisation. Theorists also recognised that reality was the result of the media constructing the world in a particular way by representing the world through the active work of selecting and presenting, structuring and shaping. The contemplation of these questions marked a return to Marxist notions of ideology.

2.3 Structuralist and instrumentalist perspectives

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[7] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T, Curran J. & Wollacott, J. (Eds). *Culture, Society and the Media.* 1982. P. 59.

The critical paradigm developed the concept of ideology on two fronts: structuralism and instrumentalism. Structuralism and instrumentalism have developed separately, and even antagonistically, but Hall comments that an adequate analysis needs to incorporate both perspectives.[8] A comprehensive analysis of media control must evaluate the complex interplay between intentional action and structural constraint at every level of the production process. A structural analysis provides a map of the range of options open to allocative controllers and the pressures that influence them while an instrumental analysis provides the biographies and interests of key allocative personnel and evaluates the consequences for the organisation and output of production.

The structuralist approach maintains that the real world does not propose or maintain its own integral, single, and intrinsic meaning but a meaning produced by structures of social production which accord the world its meaning. This meaning is created by the owners of the means of production who have the power to define an ideology that generates collective understandings and consent in society which represents the world on their terms. Ideology is embedded in the population's consciousness through a framework of linked ideological propositions that are similarly premised, predicted, and inferred, so that a premise has to be assumed to be true for the propositions which depend on it to be taken as true. Public discourse is, therefore, referenced in the structures of social knowledge that have been accepted as legitimate, and that bind individuals in a complicitious relationship that accepts the 'reality' of the discourse itself.

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[8] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T, Curran J. & Wollacott, J (Eds).. P. 59. P. 125

The structuralist perspective, therefore, focuses on context and determinism. It concentrates on the manner in which the policies and operations of corporations are limited and circumscribed by the general dynamics of the media industries and the underlying logic of the economy.[9] Two examples of how this occurs are: the high costs involved in entering the marketplace means only those with substantial capital are able to participate; and how media income is generated from advertisers who require predictable audiences with disposable income and thereby dictate the characteristics of the products found in the market.[10]

Instrumentalism adopts an 'action' approach that focuses on the concept of power and identifies the key controllers and examines how they promote their own interests, ideas and policies. It proposes that as capitalism produces the largest part of the cultural domain it is quite naturally intended to provide its own defence by preventing the development of class consciousness in the working class. This approach stresses the continuing centrality of ownership as a source of control over the policies and activities of large communication corporations.[11]

There are three principle variations of the instrumentalism approach. First, at a specific level instrumentalism focuses on evaluating the control exercise by individual capitalists to advance their own particular interests.[12] The evidence for this type of

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[9] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 124, 144.

[10] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 145 - 146.

[11] ibid. P. 125.

[12] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 125, 141.

control is contradictory because although there are examples of the media serving the

interests of its owners there are also instances in which what the media produce does

not serve the interests of its corporate organisation - such as the publishing critical

stories. Second, at a general level instrumentalism examines the coincidence between

the values and views of the capitalist class and the general media. It looks at the ways

in which the communication industry as a whole operates to reinforce the general

interests of the capitalist class.

General instrumentalism provides evidence by describing four main processes. These

are: the way the media misrepresent structural inequalities and evoke the

communalities of consumerism, community and nationality; the manner in which the

media fragment and disconnect the major areas of social experience by counterposing

production against consumption; the way the media displace power from the

economic to the political sphere and from property ownership to administration; and

how the media transform structural inequalities into personal differences.

Hall states that the difficulty with this type of instrumentalism is that it can describe

the similarity between patterns of ownership and patterns of output but is unable to

provide an explanation.[13] It assumes that the owning class intentionally pursue their

collective ideological interests. It therefore begins to sound like a conspiracy theory

involving cliched scenes of secret meetings and handshakes which can never be

proved.

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[13] ibid. P. 143.

The third version of instrumentalism stresses the centrality of economic interests and views the production of a legitimating ideology as the logical outcome of the search for profits. The strength of this perspective is that it does not assume a conspiracy exists as it considers the production of ideology to be the automatic outcome of the normal, regular processes through which the media works in the capitalist system. The difficulty of this approach is that it still needs to locate an 'action' by showing the actual existence of motivation and a means of action.

A study of the media that assimilates both the structuralist and instrumentalist approaches is able to provide a comprehensive evaluation of its role. It is able to provide a context that explains the artificial reality and its structures within which the media functions and the ability of the dominant class to influence the media within that reality.

2.4 Hegemony

The concept of hegemony is predominantly associated with the work of Antonio Gramsci and explains how ideology works in society. Gramsci extended the concept of hegemony, which had been expressed in communist interpretations of political leadership in state control, by adding the elements of intellectual and moral leadership[14]. Gramsci was interested in how the ideological and state apparatuses established a link between the dominant class's long term interests and the dominated classes narrow economic interests, which resulted in the dominated classes consenting

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[14] Jessop, B. *The Capitalist State.* Martin Robertson & Company Ltd. Oxford. 1982. P. 150.

to economic exploitation and political oppression.[15] He considered that social control took two forms, with 'consent normally in the lead operating behind the armour of coercion.' That is, social control worked externally by influencing behaviour through rewards and punishments, and internally through hegemony as it 'moulded personal convictions into a replica of prevailing norms.'[16] Hegemony refers to an 'order in which a common socio-moral language is spoken in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour.'[17]

Hegemony describes the way in which the ruling class exercise political, intellectual, and moral leadership in the production and mobilisation of consent in dominated social groups.[18] The validity of this consent does not depend on the assumption that individuals are always content with the dominant conception of the world but rests on the fact that at a general level individuals do accept it.[19] The quality of the consent is dependent on the characteristics of the individual and their personal experiences. Consent may be: the result of the individual's fear of the consequences of non-conformity; or a result of habitual behaviour; a conscious attachment to, or agreement with the core values; or pragmatic acceptance.[20]

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[15] ibid. P. 18.

[16] Femia, J. V. *Gramsci's Political Thought.*Clarendon. Oxford. 1981. P. 24.

[17] ibid. P. 24.

[18] Jessop, B. *The Capitalist State.* P. 148.

[19] Femia, J. V. 1981. P. 45.

[20] ibid. P. 45.

Hegemony is fluid in that it constantly adjusts and compromises to account for popular interests and demands.[21] This dynamic enables the dominant group to maintain the support and alliances that exist within its political relations and which support the attainment of national goals which serve it's long term interests.[22] Intellectual and moral leadership is provided through ethical-political and ideological practices which operate on or through the prevailing system of beliefs, values, common-sense assumptions and social attitudes that organise popular culture and adapt it to the needs of the dominant mode of production.[23]

Gransci's interpretation of hegemony has been adopted by a diverse range of theorists in dealing with what may be termed socialisation. A discussion of these applications serves to flesh out the characteristics of hegemony. Socialisation may be conceived of as the general means by which each individual is attuned to the social, political and economic requirements of the community in which they live. Socialisation is defined by Damon et. al. (1997), from an individual perspective as the process through which an individual acquires their particular political orientation - their knowledge, feelings and evaluations regarding the world.[24] At a systems-level perspective socialisation can be defined as the 'the process through which citizens acquire views that become aggregated in ways that have consequences for the political life of a nation.[25]

[21] Jessop, B. *The Capitalist State*. 1982. P. 148.

[22] ibid. P. 148.

[23] ibid. P. 148.

[24] Barner-Barry, C. Rosenwein, R. *Psychological Perspectives on Politics*. Longman. Englewood Cliffs. New Jersey. 1984. P. 81.

[25]ibid. P. 82.

J. Ellul uses the term 'propaganda' to describe what he perceives as a unique

phenomenon that results from the totality of forces pressing down on the individual in

society as it reaches and encircles the whole individual, and all individuals[26]. Ellul

continues,

> 'Propaganda tries to surround man by all possible routes, in the realm
>
> of feelings as well as ideas, by playing on his will or on his needs,
>
> through his conscious and his unconscious, assailing him in both his
>
> private and public life. It furnishes him with a complete system for
>
> explaining the world, and provides immediate incentives to action.'[27]

What I term socialisation Ellul described as sociological propaganda, of which he

states: 'it conditions; it introduces a truth, an ethic in various benign forms, which,

although sporadic, end by creating a fully established personality structure.'[28] It acts

slowly, by penetration, and is most effective in a relatively stable and active society.

Society is, therefore, based on an atmosphere which influences people imperceptibly

by producing a 'progressive adaptation to a certain order of things, a certain

conception of human relations, which unconsciously moulds the individual and makes

them conform to society.'[29]

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[26] Reynolds, H. T. . P. vii & 11.

[27] ibid. P. 11.

[28] Ellul, J. *Propaganda*. Vintage Books. New York. 1965. P. 66.

[29] ibid. P. 64 - 66.

F. Wilhoite uses the term 'indoctrinational persuasion' to describe the socialisation

processes 'attempt to shape peoples' beliefs, attitudes and biases so that they will act

in predictable ways to political events.'[30] He goes on to state that it is a 'process

which begins in childhood, as parents teach their children basic cultural norms about

authority, settlement of disputes, friends and enemies, rights and responsibilities.'[31]

This process continues throughout the lifespan as individuals interact with the social

and cultural environment which is ever changing but relatively stable at any given

moment.[32]

In his book 'Public Opinion in American Politics' Bennett discusses socialisation

from a political perspective and states that 'individuals acquire political values and

beliefs through socialisation, which is the domain of the individual and society.'[33]

Bennett goes on to say 'socialisation involves an interaction between psychological

and social variables. The content, salience, and coherence of the political orientations

of the individual are determined by social factors, such as group norms, social

pressures, and the consistency of social experience. He is, therefore, commenting that

the psychology of each individual's learning and thinking effects the way in which the

individual assimilates and organises social orientations.

2.5 Ideological State Apparatuses

[30] Willhoite, F. *Power and Government.*. P. 32.

[31] ibid. P. 32

[32] Barner-Barry, C. Rosenwein, R. 1985. P. 99.

[33] Bennett, T. *Public Opinion in American Politics.* Longman Inc. New York. 1983. P. 134.

The dominant class ideology mediates hegemony through what Althusser termed 'ideological state apparatuses' which are located in the social formation to secure the ideology of the dominant group.[34] Althusser expanded the notion of the productive system by arguing that society must be considered on an expanded scale as a single integrated system and therefore reproduced holistically.[35] That is, reproduction should be perceived as 'social reproduction' as social conditions such as the conditions of labour power, and the relations of production, are fundamental elements in the system.[36] This conception of the social system requires the agency of all the apparatuses of the state which are not directly linked with production or the state but which define the productive environment, such as: the family, education system, cultural institution and media apparatuses.

'Ideological State Apparatuses' allow the percolation of ideology through society which perpetuates the dominant social order. This allows ideology to disguise its real intent by allowing participants to appear alone in their pursuit of interests when they are in fact bound by a multitude of invisible contracts which tie them to relations of capitalist exchange which support the dominant order. Gramsci considers that 'ideological state apparatuses' achieve this by: shifting emphasis and visibility from production to exchange; fragmenting classes into individuals; and by binding individuals into a 'passive community' of consumers.

[34] Jessop, B. *The Capitalist State*. 1982. P. 149.

[35] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolocott, J (Eds).. 1977. P. 335 - 336.

[36] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolocott, . (Eds). 1977. P. 335.

Curran, Gurevitch and Woolacott quote Poulantas's comments that 'ideological state apparatuses' support the dominant social order by performing three critical functions. First, they mask, conceal and repress the class-dominating and class-exploitative nature of the system. Second, they fragment and separate the collective interests of the working classes into internal oppositions between different strata of their classes. Third, they impose an imaginary unity and coherence which disguises the real class relations and economic contradictions and replaces them with non-antagonistic ideological totalities such as the 'community', the 'nation' and 'consensus'.

The press as an ideological state apparatus perform three cultural functions which are fundamental to the reproduction of society and the continued domination of the owners of capital. First, it constructs a 'whole society' and social totality by creating a coherence out of the separate and fragmented images, representations and ideas in society.[37] That is, it is responsible for providing a basis on which groups and classes construct an 'image' of their lives, meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes.

Second, it provides leadership in a dynamic society by providing social realities where they did not exist before and new directions to tendencies already present so as to cast new developments as acceptable or unacceptable. The press, therefore, determine between preferred and excluded explanations and rationales, between permitted and deviant behaviours, meanings and values, and oppositional ones. Third, it facilitates a production of consensus and a construction of legitimacy. This involves the shaking

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[37] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolocott. (Eds). 1977. P. 340.

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down of a reality which is selectively represented and selectively classified into an acknowledged social order which constructs and shapes a consensus.

The press provide a medium which conveys the dominant ideology by facilitating the individual's acceptance of the social system's organisational structures and belief systems. The press as an 'ideological state apparatus' is fundamental to the evolution of an ideological set of beliefs in society which spell out what is valued and what is not, what must be maintained and what must be changed, and the shaping of the attitudes of those who share it accordingly, and the relation of social and political behaviour and action.[38]

The dominant class exploit the press by employing it to convey the defining elements of its ideology. The press provide answers to the individual questions of: who will be the rulers, how the rulers will be selected, and by what principles they will govern; it constitutes an argument, that is, it is intended to persuade and to counter opposing views; it integrally effects some of the major values of life; it embraces a programme for the defence or reform or abolition of important social institutions; it is, in part a rationalisation of group interest - but not necessarily of the groups espousing it; it is normative, ethical, moral in tone and context; and finally, it is torn from the context a broader belief system, and shares the structural and stylist properties of that system.[39]

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[38] Macridis, R. C. *Contempoary Political Ideologies.* Winthrop Publishers. Cambridge, Mass. 1980. P. 9.

[39] Lane, R. *Political Ideology.* Free Press of Glencoe. New York 1962. P. 14.

The press therefore impose what may be termed a Lockean perspective of society in which the dominant groups fundamental perceptions frame the life of each individual. These perceptions are summarised by Parenti as:

> 'individuals are free to make their own way; that freedom is to be defined in competitive terms; that 'equality' of opportunity, means the right to move ahead of others and become unequal of them in life chances; that our goal is self-advancement rather than collective betterment; that private property and the profit system are the mainstays of society, essential to democratic freedoms; that business enterprise and giant corporatism are not a danger to democracy but among its pluralistic components; that democracy is defined as a process encompassed in party elections and parliamentarianism, functioning with presumably meaningful substantive effort regardless of inequalities in wealth and power; that the people are self-governing and free to change social arrangements through regulating procedures.'[40]

2.6 Contemporary developments in Marxism

Marxist considerations of the media can further develop by incorporating empiricist elements into its theory and analysis which work to strengthen its theoretical position. The Marxist and Empiricist perspectives have been misrepresented as opposing poles of the theoretical spectrum and while in some ways they are fundamentally different

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[40] Parenti, M. *Power and the Powerless*. St Matrins Press. New York. 1978. P. 43.

they do in fact share a set of values and assumptions. The commonality of values and assumptions means the Marxist approach is able to adopt elements of the empirical approach and in doing so strengthen its theoretical position.

Hall, in Gurevitch et al. evidences this by looking at the similar ways in which the theories consider the media to perform its role in society and by the benefits that the inclusion of empiricism brings to Marxism. Marxist and empiricist perspectives both demonstrate the influence of the media but interpret their findings differently.[41] The Marxist perspective considers that the media is linked to the dominant classes and plays a strategic role in reinforcing dominant social norms and values which legitimise the social system. The classical empirical studies found that the media are unable to influence events at the level of the specific event, such as an election. This finding can be alternatively interpreted to show that rather than showing that the mass media has little influence it reveals the central role of the media in consolidating and fortifying the values and attitudes of audience members.

The adoption of empirical methods into Marxist considerations of the media addresses one of the fundamental weaknesses of Marxism. Marxism has tended to be theory bound which has meant it has been able to describe what it considers to occur but unable to produce evidence of the processes. Hall's article in *Culture, Society and the Media*, in an article in states that the position of Marxism is by no means secure and

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[41] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J (Eds).. 1982. P. 14.

that it requires extensive theoretical work to demonstrate the adequacy of its

explanatory terms, and to define, elaborate and develop its infant insights.[42]

The empirical approach can be used to address two particular areas of theoretical

weakness by providing tangible results to support Marxist assertions of a media

influence in society[43]. First, Marxism has tended to assume a simple relationship

between economic structures and the culture produced by the mass media. Second,

Marxism has also tended to work backwards by examining mass media output and

then inferring backwards to the avowed intentions and deliberations of its producers.

These weaknesses can be addressed by research which focuses on substantiating two

relationships: the influence of market conditions on the media and the influence of

social values and norms on the media. A consideration of the influence of market

conditions determines the resources available to the media and the extent to which

creativity is hedged by accountancy. In addition, an analysis of media ownership

patterns shows how the media's style, ambitions and practices are influenced by the

owners and the financial conditions they assert. A relationship also has to be

established betweens the norms and values of society and the propositions and

assumptions of the media as they are reflected in the media's production processes in

terms of standards, expectations, routine evaluations and implicit limitations.

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[42] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 88.

[43] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P 35.

CHAPTER THREE

The press as an ideological state apparatus

The New Zealand Press acts as an important agent of socialisation through its role as a primary distributor of information about the world we live in. The New Zealand press was founded 158 years ago in April 1840 with the publishing of the first newspaper in New Zealand by Samual Reeves in Petone, the second issue of the 'New Zealand Gazette and Britannia Spectator.'[44] The press was, therefore, part of New Zealand society from the initial years of colonisation years after the first settlers arrived and at the time the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. The appearance of daily newspapers, such as the *Otago Daily Times* and the *New Zealand Herald* followed in the 1860s and 1870s, signalled a recognition by proprietors that the press was a 'cheap mass media and a viable business.'[45] This provides an indication of the press's motivation at the moment of conception. In the 158 years since its foundation the press has evolved in concert with New Zealand society into a 160 million dollar industry each year.[46]

3.1 The press in New Zealand

The importance of the press to the socialisation of New Zealand society is revealed by information released annually by the Newspaper Publishers Association of New Zealand that provides a statistical portrait of the newspaper industry. In introducing the information, Association President Mike Robson states that 'newspapers constitute

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[44] Dominion. 27.3.95.

[45] Tucker, J. *Kiwi Journalist*. Longman Paul Limited, Auckland. 1992. P. 1.

[46] *Information about Newspapers*. The Newspaper Association of NZ (Inc). 1994. P. 1 - 3.

the largest and most important source of news for the public of New Zealand.

Robson's assertion is evidenced by statistics in terms of:

- Newspaper numbers - the Newspaper Publishers Association members, comprised of five metropolitan daily newspapers and twenty-eight provincial daily newspapers, circulate a total of 5.3 million copies each publishing day. These newspapers are complemented by 111 community newspapers of which the majority publish weekly.

- Coverage - Newspaper Publishers Association member newspapers publish in 32 towns, cities and communities. Through their distribution networks they are able to ensure that every New Zealander has access to at least one newspaper every weekday.

- Readership - every weekday approximately 1.8 million individuals over the age of ten (68% of the population) read a newspaper. At age eighteen approximately 880,000 males and 858,000 females read a newspaper each day.

- Financial - New Zealanders spend approximately $510,000 every publishing day to buy their daily newspaper, this represents nearly $3.1 million per week and nearly $160 million per year.

The reach and influence of the press is expanding as the evolution of communications technology witnesses a diversification into multi-media formats like the internet. In a

society that is increasingly computer driven the diversification of media heightens its

ability to reach individuals integrated into the mass of society.[47] Press diversification

provides the potential for an escalation of the visibility and influence of the press in

the life of the individual. Willhoite recognises this by remarking that 'it may be that

modern technologies have actually increases the capacity for manipulation and

persuasion.

The press have contributed to the social fabric of New Zealand as an integral element

in the evolution of the individual's orientation in the contemporary economic, political

and social structures. The owners of the means of production have recognised

information as power and undertaken to control its distribution by utilising the press

to enshrine the dominant group's perspective of philosophical concepts such as

freedom, democracy and capitalism as fundamental tenets' of society.

3.2 Press ownership

A study of the ownership patterns in the New Zealand press shows how it's role as a

socialising agent has been recognised and implemented by the elite. The 1960s

witnessed a trend towards ownership concentration in the New Zealand press with the

rise of two powerful business entities, the Wilson and Horton family company and

Independent Newspapers Limited. This trend has continued with the contemporary

newspaper environment dominated by two large corporations, Independent

Newspapers Limited and the new owner of what was Wilson and Horton, Independent

Newspapers.

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[47] Ellul, J. *Propaganda*. Trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner. New York: Vintage Books, 1965. P. 9.

Under market conditions the vulnerability of small media corporations in a business

which transcends international boundaries has witnessed the entry of international

conglomerates into the New Zealand media. Independent Newspapers Limited is the

flagship for Rupert Murdoch's global media empire, while the advent of Tony

O'Reilly's Dublin based Independent Newspapers purchase of Wilson and Horton

could result in the overwhelming majority of the New Zealand press being owned by

two international media empires which are collectively world billions. This places the

New Zealand press under the financial tutelage of global media empires which exert a

shareholders prerogative to maximise profit upon the companies they have colonised.

An overview of the characteristics of press ownership in New Zealand evidences the

dominance of Independent Newspapers and Independent Newspapers Limited in

terms of:

* *Metropolitan newspapers.* About 85% of the country's daily newspaper circulation

  is owned by two companies, International Newspapers Limited (46%) and

  International newspapers (38%). Only eleven of twenty-eight daily newspapers are

  classified as 'independent.' Apart from the 'Otago Daily Times' they are mostly

  smaller papers, some of which are partly owned by the two major companies. Most

  of the largest shareholders in both these companies and in International

  Newspapers Limited's major owner, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, are

  large organisations, such as insurance companies.'[48]

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[48] Tucker, J . *Kiwi Journalist.* Longman Paul. Auckland. 1992. P. 2.

- *Community newspapers*. About 1.8 million community newspapers are circulated

  free in New Zealand each week, mostly as weekly or bi-weekly publications. A

  larger proportion of the 110 papers are owned by the major companies, particularly

  International Newspapers Limited. The biggest are in Auckland, where the seven

  international Newspapers Limited community newspapers bring in an annual profit

  as high as five million dollars in a good year.[49]

3.3 Newspaper owners

Independent Newspapers Limited and Independent Newspapers are large international

corporate entities with interests that span the world. Coleridge comments that Rupert

Murdoch is never much more than an hours' flight from an office where he pays the

rent[50]. Rupert Murdoch's Independent Newspapers Limited is the largest newspaper

company in the world in terms of size and spread.[51] He owns fifteen Sunday

newspapers and one hundred and nine dailies or bi-weeklies in North America,

Europe, the Far East and Australia with a total circulation of sixty million each week.

Five of his newspapers are considered flagships: The Australian, The News of the

World, The Sun, The Sunday Times, and The Times. Independent Newspapers owns

sixty-seven newspapers throughout the world. Four are considered to be company

flagships: The Irish Independent, The Sunday Independent, The Independent, and The

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[49] ibid. P. 2.

[50] Coleridge, N. *Paper Tigers: the latest greatest newspaper tycoons and how they won the world.*
William Heinemann Ltd and Mandarin Paperbacks. London. 1993. P. 478.

[51] ibid P. 478 - 480.

Independent on Sunday - with the group also owning another fifteen newspapers in Britain and Ireland, six in South Africa, and foury-two in Australia.

Nicholas Coleridge interviewed twenty-eight newspaper proprietors for his book titled *Paper Tigers* which profiles twenty-eight of the largest newspaper companies in the world. He concludes by commenting that 'The more I pondered the role of the owners in determining their newspapers' futures, the more pivital it seemed. Much more than his editors or general managers who might at any moment be replaced, the proprietors sets not just the agenda but the whole mood and context and level of expectation.'[52] There are two principle means by which proprietors may exercise control over their newspapers: philosophically and financially.[53]

The proprietors are able to set the tone of their newspapers and the newspaper industry in general - as their concentration of ownership continues to increase - by explicitly or implicitly steering the news values. Coleridge states that 'proprietors preferences and prejudices are disseminated down through their editors until they inform the entire corporate culture of their empire until, for instance, in a Murdoch newspaper it becomes second nature to clip away at the foundations of the British establishment. Virtually no article can find a place in the paper unless it conforms to that line.'

The principle means through which this is achieved is agenda-setting. Coleridge found the phrase which owners used to describe what they really do was most often that of

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[52] Coleridge, N. 1993. 534.

[53] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 18.

'setting the agenda.'[54] Both Tony O'Reilly and Rupert Murdoch used this expression. Lord Rothermere is quoted as saying 'We have all these ships of the line, frigates and whatnot, sailing all over the place. The admiral doesn't tell any individual captain how to sail his ship, but he does tell him in what direction he should head.'[55] Coleridge suggests the role of the owner is to percieve a pattern in the chaos of demography and to supply an overview.

In considering where the armanda is heading it is interesting to look at the type of people who the proprietors socialise with and who they enlist as members of their boards of directors who help define the general direction of their newspapers. It is not surprising that people of stature gravitate towards people of similar influence but it does provide interesting information as to the owners orientation in terms of world view.

Two of the most striking boards in the press world sit on the Washington Post board and that of Conrad Black's holding company, Hollinger. Kay Graham's Board of Directors at the Washington Post includes: Jim Burke, the former chairman and CEO of Johnson and Johnson; Don Keough, the President and CEO of Coca-cola; and Tony O'Reilly.[56] While the board of directors of Hollinger includes: Henry Kissinger; Dr. David Brinkly, National Security Advisor, and Richard N. Perle, the former US Assistant Secretary of Defense; the late Sir James Goldsmith, an industrialist and

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[54] ibid P. 19.

[55] ibid P. 19.

[56] ibid P. 84.

financier; Lord Rothschild; Lord Hanson; and the former chairman of the US Federal Reserve.[57] Board meetings coincide with a gala dinner at which the former President Nixon and Lady Thacher have been guests of honor.

Through their economic and social position proprietors have access to the significant figures of the world stage. Kay Graham is often cited by magazine articles concerning the top ten most influential Americans as having an automatic place in the top three.[58] Coleridge states that she accepted, and then enjoyed the fact that as the owner of the 'Washington Post' she would be lobbied and lauded by a constant succession of prominant businesspeople and politicians.[59] Grahame gives power dinner parties nearly every week which are frequented by people such as the President, the Chief of Staff, and the CEOs of multinational companies.[60]

Tony O'Reilly obviously has a liking for the company of world statemen, whether it be 'playing tennis with George Bush' or having meetings with Nelson Mandela and Lady Thatcher, while Murdoch has also massaged his relationship with the party of government in countries within his sphere of interest.[61]

There is also evidence to suggest that the proprietors of the press are philosophically and economically linked to other capitalist producers in society. The arguement that

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[57] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 345.

[58] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 77.

[59] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 91.

[60] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 77.

[61] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 456 - 507.

the media is tied socially, politically, and economically to the rest of the economic

elite is supported by the case of O'Reilly who is also president, chairman, and chief

executive officer of H.J. Heinz, and who in 1991 earned $75 million in salary,

bonused and stock options. He also sits of various boards throughout the business '

world, including the Washington Post. While the striking fact about Murdock's

newspaper group is that it forms only only a third of his media empire. In 1992 his

newspaper revenues where thirty-seven percent of the groups total revenue with the

remainder coming from magazines, films, books, and television. The diversification of

O'Reilly into two spheres of influence and Murdoch into a range of media provides

evidence of a llink between economic and cultural production. The proprietors require

the same capitalist conditions to prosper and consequently the range of industries

function with a commonality of interests and prerogatives.

Don Grahame, the publisher of the 'Washington Post' has said that

> 'Ten times the most important thing the publisher does here, is pick
>
> the editor, editors. There are two editors that report to me ... and one of
>
> the first things I did when I became publisher was to pick Meg
>
> Greenfield as the editorial page editor. Another thing over the last
>
> many years, as the succession very gradually evolved here, was to
>
> select Len Downey as Ben Bradlee's successor. So 'I've done, for the
>
> time being, the two big things that I gotta do.'[62]

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[62] ibid P. 99.

O'Reilly has commented that 'at the end of the day if we find an editor constantly

chafes at the sort of policy we've laid down then we obviously don't want him in the

group.'[63]

Coleridge quotes a former reporter of 'The Australian' concerning Murdoch's choice

of editors:

> 'the editors are all cut from the same cloth, they're terrorists in suits.
>
> They all subscribe to the old school that the more fear you instill in
>
> people who work for you, the better the product. They are men who in
>
> my view show all the signs of being anti-intellectual and homophobic.
>
> Journalists on Murdich's papers aren't given freedon to operate as
>
> journalists should operate. There are subjects you just can't write about
>
> ... Murdoch doesn't have to spell it out. He doesn't send memos, to my
>
> knowledge, on the attitude his directors should take. The people who
>
> become Murdoch editors just know instinctively what is acceptable
>
> and what is not.'[64]

O'Reilly is not considered an intrusive owner by the standards of other proprietors and

makes his editorial point through his board of directors. He does, however, speak to

his Chief Executive every day and writes the chairman's message in the annual report

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[63] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 464 - 466.

[64] ibid P. 489.

of the Independent which he says is 'a kind of internal memo to all our editors: this is what we stand for.'[65]

On his relationship with his editors Murdoch states that 'it is quite a balance you need to strike between giving you editors elbow room and playing your full part yourself, taking responsibility.' He maintains he trusts executives on the spot to deal with problems that arise and that you've got to let your people manage and let your people edit too.'[66] Yet he is a hands-on owner who 'rings editors from a distant time zone, minutes before their front page is due to be printed, and makes suggestions over the phone to improve it. He never stops changing things, changing people, never rests.'[67]

These comments undermine the managerial thesis and the industrial perspective which hold that control of the press would pass to administrators who would assert their own values on their organisations. Press proprietors such as O'Reilly and Murdoch continue to set the tone of their organisations long after the day to day running of their newspapers has been delegated to managers by employing staff who accept and propagate their organisational ethos. It need only take a selection of articles and editorials to be brought to the attention of the proprietor for a discussion to ensure which only the owner is capable of winning.

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[65] ibid P. 466.

[66] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 486

[67] Coleridge, N. 1993. P.485 - 6, 492.

The second means by which proprietors exercise control over their newspapers is

financially. Coleridge titles a chapter about O'Reilly in his book 'The cost-cutting

charm of Tony O'Reilly.' He states that O'Reilly is one of five owners who enforce

the most stringent hands-on cost control, characterised by the drawing up of precise

business plans in which every eventuality is anticipated and budgeted for.[68] His Heinz

and newspaper strategies both combine stringent cost-cutting and delegation ... as

each year managers are challenged to slim another cent from the unit cost of each

input.[69] Coleridge quotes O'Reilly as stating, 'We're in a tough, unyielding, low-

margin, nickle-and-dime business, and I guess I bring a European pragmatism to the

job.'[70] An executive has commented that 'When O'Reilly studies a set of accounts he

is like a surgeon, having no knowledge of the personality of the patient, but who can

nevertheless find a host of inert organs waiting to be tightened or extracted. O'Reilly's

ownership means the fundamental proprietorial criteria is to make money.[71]

The proprietor of a newspaper controls the nature of the organisation by dictating the

level of financing to which it has access. The financial ability and position of a

newspaper defines the parametres within which the organisation must function and

thereby influences the development of interal structures. The role of a newwspaper is

to produce information for public consumption but the quantity and quality of that

information is dependent on the processes by which the organisation produces the

product. That is, the financial inputs determine the staffing and research resources

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[68] ibid P. 18.

[69] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 475.

[70] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 475.

[71] Coleridge, N. 1993. P. 470.

which are reflected in the size of the newspaper, and the depth and quality of the stories found in each edition.

3.4 The social responsibility model

The press masquerades as a mitigating agency outside the social structures when in fact it is a fundamental component of these structures and its symbolised role is fundamental to the socialisation of each individual in society. It provides comment on the activities of society in a manner internally coherent with the dominant dictates and structures prevalent within society and without an external check on the validity of the governing structures.

The social responsibility model of the role of the press has taken impartial terms and packaged them in a capitalist environment and capitalist structures. The social responsibility model that the press hold up as defining and legitimising its role in society is revealed in its transparency when its symbolism and ideology are recognised as that of the dominant elite. The press does not perform its functions in an objective or external sense but in a manner which is cohesive and coherent to society. There is no doubt that the press conveys information and educates, but what is important is that it conveys this information in a manner which is compatible with the governing structures. For example, in all the editorial in the leadup to the 1996 general election there were no stories suggesting that the electoral system was invalid. It would been seen as preposterous.

The modern press is founded on a model of social responsibility which states that the press is granted privileges in return for journalism that is socially responsible. A traditional evaluation of this premise is that 'social responsibility' means that the journalist does not undermine society by publishing stories which are subversive in nature. Subversive, that is, to the established structures of society. This reading beholds the journalist to the system as it leaves no room for an individual interpretation of the values of society. As long as journalists produce stories which subscribe and conform to the governing structures their validity within those structures will not be challenged.

The social responsibility model is a normative theory of the media developed by social scientists to ascertain the role of the press in society. The first attempt at a comparative statement of the major theories of the press dates from Siebert in 1955[72], and it remains the main source and point of reference for work of this kind.[73] Siebert's normative approach developed theories which expressed 'ideas of how the media *ought to* , or can be *expected to*, operate under a prevailing set of conditions and values.'[74] Normative theory has been developed by theorists such as McQuail who have refined the original models.

In his book titled *Four Theories of the Press* Siebert identified four basic theories of the press that denote four distinct relationships between the press on one hand and

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[72] Siebert, F. *Four Theories of the Press*. Publisher. City. 1956.

[73] McQuail, D. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. Sage Publications, London. 1984. P. 44 - 45.

[74] ibid P. 45.

government or society on the other.'[75] Siebert considered the original models to be

authoritarian and libertarian, with the Soviet Communist and Social Responsibility

models being ' developments and modifications of these first two.'

Social responsibility theory depicts the role of the press in liberal democratic

conditions and is, therefore, relevant to the New Zealand experience and context.

Impetus for the social responsibility model was provided by the 'Commission on

Freedom of the Press', sponsored by Henry Luce of Time magazine in 1947, which in

examining the libertarian press 'painted a picture of a sensationalist, irresponsible

press with a broad brush.'[76] In doing so it recognised the 'peril of unrestrained

liberty,'[77] and acknowledged that the free market press had 'failed to deliver the

expected benefits to society.'[78]

The Commission proposed an alternative framework based on a 'democratic

assumption' within which the press could function. The central theme of social

responsibility theory was that the press must be accountable to the public and the

society it serves and should empower individuals to make informed and wise

decisions.[79] In doing so the Commission attempted to reconcile the 'three somewhat

[75] Altschull, J. *Agents of Power: the role of the news media in human affairs*. Longman. New York. 1984. P. 182.

[76] Altschull, J. 1984. P. 180.

[77] ibid. 180.

[78] McQuail, D. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. 1983. P. 91.

[79] Altschull, 1982. P. 182.

divergent principles' of: individual freedom and choice; media freedom; and media obligation to society.[80]

In a report titled *A Free and Responsible Press* the Commission defined the role of the press under conditions of social responsibility by proclaiming the services with which the press should furnish society.[81] An appraisal of the intrinsic qualities of these serves illustrates explicitly how the Commission appropriated the agenda and role of the press, thereby confirming the press as part of the established structures which affirm the entrenched social environment. The five services were: an accurate and comprehensive account of today's news; a forum for exchange of comment; a means of projecting group opinions and attitudes to one another; a method of presenting and clarifying the goals and values of society; and a way of reaching every member of society.[82] Siebert asserts that by providing such services the press serve the political system by: providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs; enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government; safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government; and by servicing the economic system.[83]

Theorists have subsequently retained the intend of the report but modified the wording and focus to fulfil their own needs. An indication of a contemporary interpretation is

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[80] McQuail, 1983. P. 91.

[81] Siebert, F. *A Free and Responsible Press*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill. 1947.

[82] Alschull, J. 1984. P. 180.

[83] Siebert, F. *A Free and Responsible Press*. University of Illinois Press. Urbana, Ill. 1963.Publisher. City. 1979. P. 74.

provided by McQuail in a book titled *Mass Communication Theory* in which the main

principles of social responsibility theory are defined.[84] These principles read as: the

media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society; these obligations are

mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth,

accuracy, objectivity and balance; in accepting and applying these obligations, media

should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions; the

media should avoid whatever may lead to crime, violence or civil disorder, or give

offence to ethnic or religious minorities; the media as a whole should be pluralist and

reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and to

rights of reply; society and the public, following the first named principle, have a right

to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to secure

the, or a , public good.

Activity in the industry's newsroom is guided by an inherited ethos that is an

extension of social responsibility theory. The editors of the metropolitan daily

newspapers do not formally recognise 'social responsibility' as a governing model but

its theory is manifested in the pragmatic considerations that journalists and editors

perform in their day to day activities. Statements such as 'it would be hard to cite any

specific statements or declarations'[85] and 'in practice we do not worry about theories

concerning the press'[86] are therefore misleading as the same correspondents go on to

cite influences such as personal privacy, public interest, law[87] and the need to provide

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[84] McQuail, D. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. 1983. P. 91.

[85] From a letter by A. J. Petrie, Assistant Editor of *The Press*.

[86] From a letter by G Adams, Editor of the *Otago Daily Times*.

[87] From a letter by G Adams, Editor of the *Otago Daily Times*.

a conduit between the governors and governed,[88] which clearly reflect the dictates of the social responsibility model.

The role played by the press in the socialisation of the individual is illustrated by the finding that at a practical level each editor perceived the newsroom to be primarily concerned with a duty to inform, educate and entertain readers. This thesis asserts that the nature of this information, education, and entertainment is a manifestation of the dominant ideology and is consequently limited to interpretations which socialise individuals into the dominant social structures.

The primary duty was considered to *inform* the public in a professional manner. Peter Scherer, editor of *The New Zealand Herald*, stated that the press's duty is 'primarily to inform ... telling our readers things they do or might not otherwise know, and just as soon as possible.'[89] The duty to *educate* is related to the duty to inform and is more explicitly revealing as to the true nature of the process the press are involved in. An individual who is aware of information is more educated and socialised in the elite's dogma and is more educated in the dominant perspective, and thereby more receptive to further information. Informing and educating work to further each other and thereby the process of socialisation. The duty to *entertain* reinforces the notion that the press is focused on capturing the market share through an appeal to values which facilitate the sale of newspapers.

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[88] From a letter by P. J. Scherer, Editor of *The New Zealand Herald*.
[89] From a letter by P. J. Scherer, Editor of *The New Zealand Herald*.

The strength of the press lies in its ability to blur the distinction between its capitalist underpinnings and the notions of social service that society attributes to it. Its nature is revealed, however, when the social conditions of which it is a fundamental element is assessed. The role of the press is characterised by qualities such as balance, truth and objectivity which are only accurately revealed when the social context which defines them is considered.

CHAPTER FOUR

Assessment of arguments which develop the concept of ideology

Chapter four assesses the arguments which have developed, or may be applied to, the Marxist theory of 'ideology' and the role of the press in conveying it. It begins with a definition of socialism and discusses how this definition may be used as a general process and title which encompasses the strands of research that support and implement ideology. This chapter then discusses three strands of argument which contribute to the Marxist argument of ideology. First, the notion of 'false consciousness' which denotes how the individual in society has a limited conception of the world they inhabit. Second, a discussion of cognitive theory which explains how the individual must structure and filter the world cognitively to make sense of the stimuli they receive. Third, a discussion of symbolism and ritual which shows how they form structures which are applied to the world by society. The chapter will conclude by looking at patterns of ownership in the press as a characteristic of the dominant groups in society.

4.1 False consciousness

Marx's famous quote that declared the producer of material production also determines cultural production illustrates how Marx conceived of the consciousness of the individual in society as a false consciousness. The ruling class has the means to be

able to dominate and control the consciousness of society as they are the only group with the resources to be able to produce and distribute ideas. Parenti defines false consciousness by stating that

> 'if we accept that interests are neither randomly distributed nor purely
> self-generated by individuals in the social system but are shaped to
> some extent by the objective forces of the society that determine the
> limits of consciousness, then it would seem that people do not always
> decide in accordance with their own best interests, that at times they,
> may be suffering from what may be termed 'false consciousness,' that
> is, adherence to beliefs damaging to their interests.'[90]

What is considered an untrammelled interplay of ideas in society involves differences of opinion which seldom stray beyond the socialised framework of belief. Differences are treated as evidence of the free flow of opinion when in fact ideas that don't belong to the dominant ideology are not voiced.

Fromm supports this view of false consciousness through his comments on the value of the social commentary found in society. He states that 'the right to express our thoughts, however, means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own; freedom of authority is a lasting gain only if the inner psychological conditions are such that we are able to distinguish our own individuality.'[91] In effect the uniqueness

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[90] Parenti, M. 1978. P 44.

[91] Fromm, E. *The Fear of Freedom*. Routledge & Kegan. Paul. 1960. P. 266.

of the individual is compromised as they become exactly as all others are and as they expect them to be by adopting the personality prescribes by society's cultural patterns. The interplay of discussion and analysis paraded in society creates the illusion of the existence of a diverse range of opinion which is democratically contemplated, when in fact the nature of the discussion is stage managed by the limited consciousness of the participants.

The manner in which the social, economic and political framework supports existing conditions channels the community and individual and limits the ability of the individual to conceive of the other social potentialities.

4.2 Cognitive schema theory

The position of Fromm, Wright Mills and Parenti is supported by the contemporary theory of 'schematic thinking.' This theory is derived from psychology and concerns the manner in which information is organised in the individuals brain. It describes how the cognitive capacity of the individual creates mental processes which allow a false consciousness to develop. Cognitive schema theory's underlying premise is that individuals are unable to make sense of the multitudinous stimuli with which the external environment assaults their senses and consequently develop cognitive structures to interpret the world selectively and with efficiency and economy. Kertzer describes it as: 'social reality is too complex and ambiguous for the human organism to handle, hence, the innate drive to render it simpler and unambiguous, to create order where there is only chaos.'[92] Hershberg states that it is by dividing stimuli into

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[92] Kertzer, D.I. *Ritual, Politics and Power*. 1988. P.84.

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categories that the complex world is simplified and made comprehensible to the individual.[93]

Hershberg provides a simple definition of schema by declaring they are the network of interlinked conceptual categories which serve for frames of meaning.'[94] Kertner defines schema by stating that 'the information we absorb through our senses is 'processed' through pre-existing systems of schematised and abstracted knowledge, these organised knowledge structures are termed schema.'[95] A more explicit definition states a 'schema' is a cognitive structure that influences all the perceptual-cognitive activities that are labelled 'information processing' with respect to a particular domain.[96] It determines, therefore, how information received by the brain is perceived - how it is encoded and stored in the brain, how it is retrieved from the brain, and how it influences decision making.[97]

The power of schema comes from the manner in which each conceptual category interrelates with all others to provide a coherent and total cognitive package that creates a meaningful version of the world. The individual experiences and personalises stimuli based on an established pattern of attribution about the world and into which further experiences' are ordered, comprehended, and on which behaviour is based.'

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[93] Hershberg, M. S. *Perpetuating Patriotic Perceptions: The Cognitive Functions of the Cold War.* Praeger. Westport, Conn. 1993. P.25.

[94] ibid. P.26.

[95] Kertzer, D.I. 1988 P.79.

[96] Ashmore and Del Bocca (1981) in Hershberg, M. S. 1993. P.26.

[97] ibid. P.26.

The importance of schema in terms of this thesis lies in the manner they limit the individual's consciousness of the world by framing cognition within prescribed parameters that define a particular conception and perception of the world and what occurs within it. The ability of alternative world conceptions to influence cognition is compromised by the tendency of individuals to reject conflicting information under conditions of cognitive dissonance. The theory of cognitive dissonance was proposed by Leon Festinger and states that information incompatible with existing patterns of attribution and belief make the individual uncomfortable and under such conditions contrary information is ignored to alleviate conflict.[98]

The conceptual categories and their inter-relationships are held commonly in a culture and create a collective social consciousness.[99] Individuals depend on the adoption of category networks held in common with other individuals to gain access to powerful cognitive tools which allow the ordering of a sense of reality and communication on that basis. It is, therefore, through the absorption of schema that the individual is socialised as the schema they are taught and come habitually to use reflect the demands of the culture in which they live.[100] Schema define for the individual which stimuli to attend to and how to fit them into a predetermined system of symbolic understandings.

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[98] Kertzer, D.I. *Ritual, Politics and Power.* 1988. P.98.

[99] Kertzer, D. I. 1988. P.25.

[100] ibid P.25.

The way in which cognitive schema structure the world means social elites are able to

create psychological predispositions in the population which manifest in patterns of

social behaviour that fulfil their requirements.[101] The individual receives information

which complements cognitive schema through its appeal to the existing ideological

symbolism which determines social behaviour and interaction.[102] Cognitive schema,

therefore, direct attention to relevant information, guide interpretation and evaluation,

provide inferences when information is missing or ambiguous, and facilitate its

retention.[103] They define society by contributing to the socialisation of the

communities beliefs, values, norms, habits, customs, knowledge, skills, and moral

rules.[104]

The press create and maintain a social paradigm which is coherent with the governing

social structures and conveys legitimacy and authority on a the established structures

as the natural order of the world. Legitimacy addresses the fears of the individual who

would be uncomfortable in recognising the state as merely the arbitrary product of

cultural history, environmental adaptation, and political struggle.[105] The press provide

internally meaningful normative guidelines which structure the lives of society's

members, casting some actions as desirable and other as threatening. Information is

self-perpetuating as it is absorbed into preexisting structures and thereby lends

stability to the symbolically constructed world.[106]

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[101] Kertzer, D. I. 1988. P.31.

[102] ibid P.31.

[103] Kertzer, D. I. 1988. P.80.

[104] Kertzer, D. I. 1988. P.31.

[105] Kertzer, D.I. 1988. P.37 & 6.

[106] Kertzer, D.I. 1988. P.80.

4.3 Symbolism and ritual

The individual's use of cognitive schema leads to a perception and interpretation of the world through symbolism and ritual. This perception defines what the individual sees and what they are, and thereby forms the basis for meaningful action. Lippman states that every public issue or political account is a 'fiction' in that each representation of the environment is in lesser or greater degree made by man himself.[107] The correct name for something has less to do with it's true nature than the symbolism and ritual of the social context in which it exists and the dispositions that people bring to that context.[108]

A community of individuals can only commnicate meaningfully if the object of communal communication is assigned a common symbolism to replace the raw object of interest. A symbol is therefore defined as any communication device that substitutes a meaningful image for the thing that the community wants to address.[109]

A symbol as portrayed in society and by the press is characterised by three fundamental properties: a condensation of meaning, multivocality, and ambiguity.[110] Condensation refers to the way in which the symbols used by the press represent and unify a rich diversity of meanings which are simultaneously elicited by different individuals and interact with one another so they become associated together in the

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[107] Bennett. W. L. *Public Opinion in American Politics.* Longman Inc. New York. 1983. P. 250.

[108] ibid. P. 252.

[109] ibid. P. 250.

[110] Kertzer, D.I. *Ritual, Politics and Power.* 1988. P. 11.

individual's mind. Multivocality is a similar quality which reflects how the press attach a variety of different meanings to the same symbol so it may be understood by different people in different ways. Ambiguity refers to the way in which a precise meaning is not associateed with a symbol.

Bennett describes two fundamental types of symbolism: icons and words. Icons may be defined as non-verbal symbols which orientate people in social contexts by operating at a sub-conscious level to create moods and themes, to direct attention, to establish relations among actors, and to encourage a willingness to engage in certain types of behaviour.[111] The press construct and maintain icons by providing individuals with a daily discussion of the world that is limited in its conception to exclusive reference to icons.

Words combine in language exhibited in the press to create conscious representations of categories which impose a strictly formalised logic on the emotional and physical sensations of the world. Language is the principle means by which the world is defined as it is the dominant means of individual communication, and the consuming symbolism of the press.[112] A 'thing' can not exist until it has been labelled by language and categorised accordingly in the collective conscious of the population. The elite, through the press, use language's highly developed system of symbols to create a world in their own image through the use of a huge vocabulary of terms with

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[111] Bennett. W. L. 1983. P. 251.

[112] Bennett. W. L. 1983. P. 254.

highly developed rules for their use and interpretation.[113] The capacity of language

allows the press to frame the world as 'what is being said is the right thing because by

the acceptance of the formalisation of language it is the only thing.'[114]

Ritual supports the symbolic framework with which the press portray the world by

creating formal and symbolic behaviour which is socially standardised and

repetitive.[115] It follows highly structured and standardised sequences which are often

enacted at certain places and certain times that are themselves endowed with a

symbolic meaning. The repetitious nature of ritual provides an important means of

channelling emotion, guiding cognition, and organising social groups. Ritual action

gives meaning to the world and ultimately becomes the world as the inner becomes

the outer and the subjective world picture becomes reality.

Ellul discusses his notion of 'sub-propaganda' in terms of myth and conditioned

reflexes. In doing so he describes how symbolism and ritual create belief and

behavioural systems in the individual.[116] He continues by stating that the press

contribute to the creation of conditioned reflexes in the individual by training them to

produce unfailing reactions to certain words, signs, persons, and facts. Myths are all-

encompassing and activating images. Through their use the press is able to create a

vision of desirable objectives which over time lose their material, practical character

and become coloured, all-encompassing, and which displace from the consciousness

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[113] ibid. P. 252.

[114] ibid. P. 250.

[115] Kertzer, D.I. 1988. P. 9.

[116] Ellul. *Propaganda.* 1965. P. 31.

all that is not related to them. A myth, therefore, inspires an individual to behave in a

socially appropriate manner because it feels good, just, and true.'

4.4 Concentration of ownership in society

The evaluation of ownership patterns in the media establishs a link between the ruling

class and control of the media, and also to establish the centrality of the media in

facilitating the dominant ideology of the ruling class through the media's cultural

production. The validity of the theory of 'ideology' depends on theorists establishing

the dominant elites ability to do so.

Theorists such as Poulantas have considered the media to establish ideological

underpinnings by performing 'dividing and unifying' functions by concealing the

centrality and pervasiveness of class inequalities and invoking community interests

which stems from a shared citizenship of the nation state.[117] Theorists have also

concentrated on the images of class conveyed by the media that focus on consumption

rather than production, and stress consumer differences rather than the structural

differences and inequalities which are the basis for the differences.[118]

Murdoch and Golding contend that concentration of ownership creates economic

processes which result in two fundamental consequences for cultural production. They

cite several reasons for this, first, the range of material available will tend to decline as

market forces exclude all but the commercially successful. Second, this evolutionary

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[117] Curran, J. Gurevitvh, M & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 36

[118] ibid. P. 36.

process systematically excludes those media which lack economic resources and power. This results in groups already established in the media being able to consolidate their position, and the exclusion of alternative groups who lack the capital basis for entry into the market. The media organisations which survive tend to belong to owners who prosper under market conditions and are therefore unlikely to criticise the prevailing distribution of wealth and power. Ownership patterns therefore tend to result in the exclusion of alternative perspectives and interpretations of the world which challenge the dominant class's world view.

Murdoch and Goulding also argue that the media's affirmation of prevailing social conditions is a tendency heightened within the conditions of the marketplace as the pressure for revenue creates a drive towards market maximisation. Hirsch and Gordon comment that in conditions of oligopolistic competition there is a tendency for competition to serve the centre of the market at the expense of minority tastes.[119] To maximise audiences the media: lower production costs by concentrating on the familiar and on formulas which are as similar as possible to the tried and true; news and entertainment converge as the media adopt audience holding and presentation as criteria for preparing their products; convert successful products in one form into other mediums; recycle products which become successful at different points in time; increase their scale by entering other markets and thereby reduce the diversity of external markets as well.

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[119] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 39 - 40.

The media is, therefore, defined by the needs of production, the limitations of cost, and concern for audience maximisation. This results in news which portrays the world as 'fragmented and unchanging, and in which dissent and opposition appear as ephemeral, peripheral and irrational.' Murdoch and Golding conclude that 'news becomes palliative and comforting, intentionally undisturbing and unthreatening, focusing on institutions of consensus maintenance and the handling of social order. The concentration of media ownership creates a tendency for the commercial media to 'avoid the unpopular and contentious and to draw instead on the values and assumptions which are most familiar and most widely legitimised, which almost inevitably means those which flow authoritatively downwards through the social structure.[120]

The alternative media is unable to gain a significant foothold. Alternative views are therefore confined to limited space and resources within mainstream media where it is easily swamped by the dominant content. These views receive limited exposure and are implicitly labelled as 'minority views' which reinforces their marginality and hinders them in gaining wider credibility.

James Curran argues, in an article titled *Capitalism and Control of the Press, 1800 - 1975*, that the free play of market forces has been the mechanism by which the range of diversity and oppositional voices in the press has been repressed as the press has become a powerful instrument of social control.[121] Curran contends that economic

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[120] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 37 - 38.

[121] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 140.

relations have succeeded in shaping ownership, professional values, structures and audiences where legal censorship and repression failed. Curran's study is interesting because it illustrates the process of ownership change in the British press and shows the influences which have narrowed the press's diversity. It provides an interesting case-study of how the media has been co-opted by the dominant class to act as an 'Ideological State Apparatus.'

Curran's analysis begins in the early 1800s when the radicle press was establishing itself as a significant influence in British society. The radicle press proposed an alternative 'world view' in which reality was not defined as the given - 'the way things are' - but as a system of oppression that could be replaced by a new social order organised on different principles.[122] It therefore posed a threat to social control by eroding adherence to the social order through it's definition of reality as a process of exploitation. The content of the radicle press focused on the working classes, attacked industrial and commercial capitalism and voiced a class-based interpretation of society.

The government attempted to constrain the radicle press through a system of press licensing, which aimed to deny tradicle actors access to the presses, and the imposition of an advertisement duty and a stamp duty tax, which was to enforce bankruptcy.[123] The radicle press survived each attempted assault.[124] In 1853 the

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[122] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 205.

[123] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 195.

[124] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977P. 210.

advertisement duty was removed and in 1855 the duty tax was repealed in response to the arguments of proponents of the 'free market'.[125] This initiated what Berridge has termed the 'Commercialisation Thesis' which asserts that the decline of the radical press was due to the commercialisation of the popular press. That is, to maximise newspaper sales the press concentrated on sensationalism rather than political analysis.

Curran states that 'freeing capital excluded pauper management of the press.' The opening of the market created an industrial revolution of the press with increased running costs and cash flow requirements so that the capital investment required conferred considerable advantages on entrepreneurs able to establish multiple newspapers which shared plant and facilities. The increase in production costs such as newsprint, newsgathering and processing, promotion, and organised labour resulted in a drive for greater circulation. This resulted in ownership and control of the popular press passing progressively into the hands of capitalist entrepreneurs with access to, or control over, large capital resources.

Curran identifies advertising as the other influence in the ideological absorption and elimination of alternative views into mainstream mass newspapers. Advertisers representing the dominant class acquired strategic control over the press as their revenue was fundamental to the press increasing revenue and covering costs. This resulted in a press focus on the middle-class who possessed disposable income rather than the working classes whose lack of spending power required the newspapers to

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[125] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 211 - 226.

have massive circulations to appeal to advertisers. Curran states that one of four things

happened to national radicle papers which failed to meet the requirements of

advertisers, they: closed down; accommodated advertising pressure by moving up

market; stayed in a small audience ghetto with manageable loses; or they accepted 'an

alternative source of institutional patronage.[126]

The evolution of the press under conditions of the market provided the basis for the

expansion of a powerful institution of social control reaching widely and deeply into

society. Curran argues that the reconstituted British press functioned as an important

'Ideological State Apparatus' by creating working-class support for aristocratic

factions in parliament and converting them into mass political organisations. It also

invigorated parties by providing a channel of communication with their rank and file.

And it provided a powerful source of social cohesion by constructing a reality system

which denied the existence of class conflict, it portrayed profits as the source of

wealth and the capitalist as the instigator of prosperity, and it stressed individual self-

improvement and the notion that anyone through their own efforts could become

successful.

Curran concludes by stating that the press are a 'powerful integrative force in society

which has contributed materially to the remarkable stability and high degree of

allegiance to British political institutions that has persisted in Britain despite her loss

of empire and continuing economic crises.[127]

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[126] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 221.

[127] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 226.

Graeme Murdoch examines the relationship between economic and cultural power and the role of the media in shaping social consciousness in an article titled 'Large Corporations and the Control of the Communications Industries.'[128] Murdoch focuses on the contrasting theories of 'industrial society' as initially proposed by Saint Simon and Auguste Comte and 'capitalism' as founded by Marx. Marx's fundamental position asserted that 'the owners of the new communications companies were members of the general capitalist class and they used their control over cultural production to ensure that the dominant images and representations supported the existing social arrangements.'[129]

Murdoch states that Marx's conception of the media in society has been interpreted as both structuralist instrumentalist. That it, is not focused on the interests and activities of capitalists or on the structure of the capitalist economy and its underlying dynamics. The later considers primary importance to reside with the capitalist's location in the general economic system and the constraints and limits that this imposes.

The 'industrial theory' of the media argued that as the new industrial order developed ownership would become less and less significant, and effective control over production would pass to the groups who commanded the necessary industrial technologies and organisations: the scientists, engineers and administrators. This view

[128] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T, Curran, J. &Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 119.

[129] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. 126.

contributed to two fields of investigation.[130] First, the evaluation of the balance of power and influence within individual corporations. And second, pluralism which saw the controllers of various cultural industries as relatively autonomous entities competing with similar organisations to fulfil the demands of the consumers.

The Marxist reply comes in two forms. The structuralists contend that the nature of constraints on profitability and their implications for corporate behaviour provides corporate control. While instrumentalists assert the continuing centrality and power of the individual owners and the capitalist class.

Instrumentalism adopts an 'action' approach which focuses on the concept of power and identifying the key controllers and examining how they promote their own interests, ideas and policies. Instrumentalism proposes that as the largest part of the cultural domain is produced by capitalism it is quite naturally intended to help in the defence of capitalism by preventing the development of class consciousness in the working class.[131] This approach stresses the continuing centrality of ownership as a source of control over the policies and activities of large communication corporations.[132]

There are three strands to this approach. First, at the specific level it focuses on evaluating the control exercised by individual capitalists to advance their own

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[130] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 128 - 129.

[131] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 141.

[132] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 125.

interests.[133] The evidence for this type of control is contradictory as although there are examples of the media serving the interests of its owners there are also instances in which what is produced by the media does not serve the interests of the corporate organisation - such as writing stories critical of parent company activities.[134]

Second, at the general level instrumental approaches examine the ways in which communications industries as a whole operate to reinforce the general interests of the capitalist class, or dominant factions of it. It provides evidence by describing: the way the media misrepresent structural inequities and evoke the communalities of consumerism, community and nationality; the way they fragment and disconnect the major areas of social experience by counterposing production against consumption; the way they displace power from the economic to the political sphere and from property ownership to administration; and the way that structural inequalities are transformed into personal differences.[135]

The difficulty with this type of instrumentalism is that it can describe the simarility between patterns of ownership and patterns of output but can not explain it.[136] It has to assume the owning classes intentionally pursue their collective ideological interests through their control over cultural production. It therefore begins to sound like a conspiracy theory which can never be proved.

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[133] ibid. P. 125.

[134] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 141.

[135] ibid. P. 142.

[136] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 143.

A third version of instrumentalism stresses the centrality of economic interests and views the production of a legitimating ideology as the logical outcome of the search for profits. The strength of this perspective is that it does not assume the conspirational view as it considers the production of ideology to be the outcome of normal, regular processes by which commercial mass communications work in the capitalist system. As an action approach, however, it still has to locate the actual existence of motivation and the means of action.

The structural perspective emphasises context and determinism as it concentrates on the manner in which the policies and operations of corporations are limited and circumscribed by the general dynamics of the media market and the underlying logic of capitalist economies.[137] Some examples of how this occurs are: the costs involved in entering the marketplace means only those with substantial capital are able to participate; and that income is generated from advertisers who require predictable audiences with disposable income and thereby dictate the characteristics of the product found in the market.[138]

Gurevitch and Blumler evaluate the relationship that exists between politicians and the media by adopting a systemic approach. This approach is discussed from a combined structuralist and institutional and regulatory perspectives.[139] Gurevitch and Blumler contend that a systems' approach is able to link diverse 'bodies of evidence

[137] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 124 - 144.

[138] Gurevitch, M. Bennett, T. Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1982. P. 145 - 146.

[139] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 288.

into a broader analytical perspective' which provides an accurate assessment of each elements emphasis.[140]

Gurevitch and Blumler identify three sources of media power. The sources they identify show how the power of the media is established by its position in society's structures and is manifested in a variety of ways. A structural basis of media power stems from the unique ability of the media to deliver an audience to the politician. A normative basis of media power comes from the relationship of credibility and trust which different media organisations have developed with their audiences. A normative basis of media power comes from the respect for tenets of liberal philosophy, such as freedom of expression and the need for safeguards against possible abuses of authority which legitimises the independent role of media organisations in society.

They maintain that political and media organisations interact together in terms of boundary maintenance. The product of this interaction results in a stream of specific messages, but more importantly establishes the ground rules that prescribe the standardised formats through which information is regularly presented to the public.[141] The media are involved in the legitimisation of authority and serve functions of political articulation, mobilisation, conflict, and agenda setting.

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[140] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 271 - 275.
[141] ibid. P. 280.

Gurevitch and Blumler identify three main sources of constraint that political

institutions exercise over the media. Sources of legal constraint are the rules and

regulations which define the rights and obligations of media institutions that are

enforceable by the executive and judicial branches of the state.[142] Normative sources

of constraint are the expectations of political and public service by the media which

may be held socially accountable without falling under the direct control of either

state or party machinery. Sources of structural constraint are the result of formal or

semiformal linkages which have been forged between media institutions and political

bodies.

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[142] Curran, J. Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (Eds). 1977. P. 285.

Chapter five

The influence of market conditions on the production processes of the media

Chapter five looks at the repercussions of financial prerogatives on the internal

processes of the press as exhibited by a reliance on sources, objectivity, and authority.

It also looks at the problems alternative sources have in attempting to access the

media. In conclusion, in discusses the rise of public relations and how the structures of

the press have created an industry that specialises in performing the function of a

source.

5.1 Concentration of ownership in New Zealand

As corporate entities Independent Newspapers and Independent Newspapers Limited

are by definition driven by an inherent financial prerogative to maximise revenue.

This compulsion centres upon a drive to provide a return to investing shareholders in

terms of dividends and increasing share prices through a maximisation share price and

readership. Quite simply, the higher the revenue achieved through cover sales, which

account for around forty percent of income, and advertising, which generates around

sixty percent of revenue the higher the return.

The need to maximise newspaper exposure creates a cultured ethos within

management and newsroom staff that is concerned primarily with increasing

readership by presenting readers with what sells. That is, a product whose content

does not challenge the reader but which affirms the public's expectations and structured belief systems. It is naive to claim that journalistic integrity does not assert an influence on content but it is a natural progression for a newspaper under an onus to increase popularity to be primarily motivated to provide the public with what they want to read.

As a business a newspaper can not ignore the attitudes of the wider business environment to which it is linked by publishing stories which challenge the values of those on which it is dependent, such as advertisers and customers. To publish articles challenging the core values of the social structures would invite negative public commentary, and criticism from vested interests in those structures, which would ultimately be reflected in declining levels of readership and circulation. Parenti states that criticism can win access to the business-controlled mass media if it does not challenge the capitalist system's legitimacy while anti-capitalist ideas and images find what exposure they can in a handful of 'little magazines' which function under the constant threat of financial extinction.[143]

5.2 Internal newspaper structures - bureaucracy and conventions of newsworthiness

As an organisation is defined by financial imperatives the press has developed internal systems which promote the production and sale of newspapers. The bureaucratic systems and processes which enable the efficient production of each edition blinker the newsroom by developing an ethos which limits the newsroom consciousness as it

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[143] Parenti, M. 1978. P. 44.

performs in a manner consonant with organisational expectations. Each article is defined by artificial processes, from conception to final editing, as the story's content is streamlined to conform with the newspapers' expectations. A journalist whose articles are continually spiked will soon be asked to leave or learn to produce stories which meet with managerial and editorial approval.

Newsroom structures and processes create conventions which ensure the perpetuation of the newspaper and in doing so create processes which are more influential that the allure of alternative content. Gans identified some of these conventions.[144]

First, the organisational constraints under which journalist labour. The principle way in which the newsroom limits journalists is through the organisational systems and structures which organise the newsroom and define the role journalist play, both individually and collectively.

Second, the processes by which beats are defined, and stories selected and edited. To deal with the diverse events which a newspaper covers each day the community is divided into manageable spheres of interest and activity which are then assigned to reporters. This results in a pattern of coverage which reflects how the newspaper has organised and orientated its coverage rather than how the events actually occurred. This arbitrary conception of the community frames how a story is reached by a reporter and how it is selected and edited back in the newsroom.

[144] Gans, H. Deciding What's News. 1990. Vintage Books. new York. 1990. P. 41 - 52

Third, the random eruption of events is reduced to routine procedure. This raises questions as to the press's ability to deal effectively with random events that are incompatible with an arbitrary division of the community. The end result is that events that can not be categorised neatly or which require an additional depth of analysis are reduced to routine treatment by the press.

Fourth, the editorial resources allocated by the publisher. The cost of running an editorial department is high and consequently its effectiveness and ability as a social commentator are dependent on the largess of the owner.

Fifth, the authorities which a news organisation defines and of whom the consult. The sources who a reporter consults are able to dominant the perspective and content of a press article. It is easier for a reporter to be able to contact official sources as they are easily identifiable and accessible while alternative sources are less well known, and therefore less accessible.

Sixth, the use of literary forms and devices which manage the overwhelming flow of events. An example of a narrative device is the pyramid story structure in which information is ordered throughout the story in paragraphs ranging from the most to least important. This enables editors to take as much of the story as they feel they should, or are able to, include. An example of a specific literary device is the list of briefs which run down a page. This enables the newspaper to acknowledge events which have occurred in the community with an economy of space and time.

The newsroom is a bureaucracy composed of hierarchically organised and centralised structures. This allows the production of a manageable newsflow by imposing processes which deal with the logistical problems associated with the constraints of space, time and resources. Decisions concerning which actors and events are attended to reflects managerial judgements which take accounts of the availability of information, the availability of sources, the time taken to prepare the story, the staff and material resources available, and the time taken to compose the story.

Herbert Gans considers that the media succeed financially by reflecting and affirming the prevailing values inherent in society.[145] In his book *Deciding Whats News* Gans synthesised work by earlier theorists and developed what he termed 'enduring values' which he states define the characteristics of society which are reflected in the selection and perspective of media content. The qualities which Gans developed highlight the coherence that exists between society and the press, and illustrates the role of the press as an agency which socialises the individual to accept society's structures as legitimate. Gans declared that the media propagate a conception of society as: moulded around the notion of the democratic system as the right system; reflecting a democratic and egalitarian system; altruistic capitalism; moderatism; individuality; and leadership.

Enduring values translate into what other theorists have termed as the 'conventions of newsworthiness' by which media organisations evaluate the saleability of information. The conventions by which the media determine which information will be

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[145] Gans, H. 1990. P. 41 - 52

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transformed into news are a manifestation of financial considerations which determine

the ability of a newspaper to return a profit. Initial research in this area was performed

by Galtung and Ruge. It was founded on a content analysis which revealed that the

news, when measured with reference to convention subject matter categories, exhibits

relatively stable and predictable patterns over time. Galtung and Ruge stated that the

significance of events is culturally determined, and therefore what is reported is news

is a matter of cultural convention.[146] Later theorists have claimed that the news is

determined to a large degree by a variety of external factors such as institutionalised

conventions in the newsgathering process, political, ideological, and cultural

requirements.[147]

In an article titled *Structuring and selecting news* Galtung and Ruge identified

organisational, genre related, and cultural elements which they considered to influence

media organisations in their selection of news stories. The organisational elements

were: frequency, information and events are more likely to become news if the time it

takes to unfold conforms to the production schedule of the media; threshold, given the

general over supply of news and the 'frequency' requirement events will have to be of

a significant magnitude to be reported; unambiguous, the more clear cut an event and

the easily it is interpreted the more likely it is to make the news; and meaningfulness,

both in terms of relevance and cultural proximity.

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[146] Galtung, J. and Ruge, M. *Structuring and Selecting the News*. 1965. P. 62.

[147] McQuail, D. *Mass Media Theory: An Introduction*. 1984. P. 142.

The genre related elements Galtung and Ruge identified were: consonance, news is

elected in accordance with a mental pre-image or expectation; unexpectedness, but

within the bounds of the meaningful and consonant; continuity, once something is on

the agenda it gains a certain momentum and tends to continue to be reported; and ·

composition, only a certain number of a certain type of event will make the news at

any one time. The culture bound elements were: reference to elite nations; reference to

elite people; and the tendency to personify events.

Contemporary analysis has been supplied by Murray Masterton in a 1992 article titled

A new approach to what makes news. This analysis illustrates how the media

propagate social values by conforming and affirming its capitalist social structures.

Masterton distributed an extensive survey to 300 journalists and teachers of

journalism in 67 countries to establish what factors or criteria they considered to make

information into news. In presenting the results Masterton was able to define a core of

three elements which must be present before any piece of information can be

considered news. These elements were *interest*, *timeliness* and *clarity*. That is, for

information to become news it must' hold interest for a substantial number of people

... it must be new, or newly available ... and it must be information which is clearly

understandable to the recipients.'[148] Information that possesses these elements has the

potential to become news.

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[148] Masterton, M. *A New Approach To What Makes News*. Australian Journalism Review. January -
June, 1992. P.11

Masterton found that the extent to which information with the three core elements became news was dependent on the presence of six international news criteria. These were; *consequence* in terms of the number of people effected by the information; *proximity* of the story in terms of society, culture, religion, audience and geography; the presence of *conflict*; the *human interest* people have in others who would not make the news for any other reason; *novelty value*; and the *prominence* of information because of who said or did it, rather than the action itself.[149] The important point is that these are not values which are pure, but they rather are loaded in value by virtue of their relationship with the social context in which they function, a society whose conditions they affirm and reinforce.

5.3 Sources

The press form a symbiotic relationship with sources which allows organisations to define the facts of the world. The press needs to have access to information that sources provide to maintain the newsflow, while sources needs to be able to express their organisation's information through the press. To determine what qualities the news represents it is necessary to establish who provides the news and how the information they provide influences who and what is the news. Shoemaker and Mayfield identify the four general factors that influence news content as: the working of media routines for collecting and processing news; the personal attitudes and socialisation of journalists; the social and institutional forces working on the news; and the efforts of power-holders to exert ideological hegemony.

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[149] ibid. P. 13

Erickson characterises this relationship as a 'convergence' between the press and

sources and states that it occurs on several levels.[150] First, at an institutional level, the

media elite is not separate from the elites who control many of the government and

corporate bureaucracies on who they report.[151] The press interlock with other

organisations in terms of ownership, management participation, and social

participation. In doing so they sustain an elite culture that circumscribes the ability of

the news media to be analytically detached from the elite people and organisations

they report on.[152]

Second, as has been discussed newspapers are business organisations and have

therefore developed operational strategies and processes. The system of sources a

newspaper develops provides information that restrains the cost of reporting and

researching to an efficient level. An emphasis on a network of sources defines the way

in which a newsroom functions by dictating the focal points at which its resources are

placed in the community, and determines the emphasis that individual sources may

exert on the press's content.

Third, sources representing components of the authoritative apparatus in society are

given preferable access to the news. Sources which represent the authority of their

offices gain preferential coverage in terms of news space, time and context. A

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[150] Erickson, R.V. *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources*. University of Toronto Press.
Toronto. 1989. P. 5.
[151] ibid. P. 5.
[152] ibid. P. 5.

dependence on sources results from the reality that reporters are unable to attend events first hand and must consequently pass their descriptive responsibility to a network of sources who witnesses the events personally. Erickson states that 'journalists tend to limit themselves to the performances' of news releases and interview quotations from source.[153] Moreover, the reliance on selected people as knowledge resources is itself limited mainly to key spokespeople for particular bureaucratic organisations.[154] Two examples of this are: sources being routinely cited as an authority in stories which pertain to their sphere of interest and activity; and news releases which contribute substantially to a news item by being cited in whole or in part.

Fourth, the dependence of reporters on sources allows the source to function as a reporter. Erickson states that it is possible to argue that the source acts as a reporter who presents an acceptable news account and the reporter as an editor who determines what aspects of this material will be used along with other accounts tailored for news purposes by other sources.[155]

This symbiotic relationship's interaction between organisational sources and the press leads to a sharing of the core values in the dominant culture as news orientates towards society's governing political and social structures.[156] The relationship between journalists and sources works when they assume, rightly or wrongly, that

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[153] Erickson, R.V. 1989. P. 1 -6.
[154] ibid. P. 1.
[155] ibid. P. 6.
[156] Erickson, R.V. 1989. P. 15.

their values are universal and dominant. Gans writes that the journalist's facts remain

facts as long as the unconscious value and reality judgements that go into them are not

questioned by trusted critics, or when they are validated by 'common sense.'[157]

The use of sources is orientated towards political and economic structures. These

structures and the bodies which inhabit them are easily identifiable and through

constant symbolic and ritual reinforcement have become the perspective of the

individual's limited consciousness. Their use allows the reporter to ground

information in a framework which shapes the content of the news. Erickson states that

'sources learn to bring their accounts into conformity with the form and content

established by journalists vis-a-vis their view of what constitutes legitimate,

reportable material.[158]

The governing social structures thereby assert an authority by legitimising the

established power conditions. Erickson perceives news as a representation of authority

and examined the ways in which various source bureaucracies are organised to

communicate through the news media.[159] He comments that in the contemporary

knowledge society news represents who are the authorised knowers and what are their

authoritative versions of reality. News constitutes an authoritative version of social

order through what sources are cited as saying, which is accepted as the facts of the

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[157] Gans, H. J. Vintage Books, A Division of Random House. new York. 1980. P. 185 - 186.

[158] Erickson, R.V. 1989. P. 15.

[159] Erickson, R.V. 1989. P. 3.

matter without further investigation, as it gives an account that serves the public expectation that their organisation is accountable.

The manner in which reporters and sources work together to elevate an individual representative of an organisation draws this comments from Gans: 'who is news seems to depend on who the sources of the news are, which in turn seems to depend on how reporters gather the news.'[160] Representatives from the established structures are tailored to fulfil the prerequisites of what the press need in a source to fulfil organisational requirements and public expectations. These are requirements alternatives sources struggle to meet. Government branches, interest groups, and industry representativesare aware of, and dedicated to meeting, these criteria and thereby filling the press's daily 'news hole'.[161]

Gans describes the characteristics of an ideal source as: *past suitability*, if sources have provided information leading to suitable stories in the past they are likely to be chosen again, until they become regular sources; *productivity*, sources are judged by their ability to supply a lot of information without undue expenditure of staff time and effort; *reliability*, story selectors want reliable sources whose information requires the least amount of verification; *trustworthiness*, when reliability can not be checked quickly enough story selectors look for trustworthy sources, those who do not limit themselves to self-serving information, try to be accurate, and above all, are honest; *authoritativeness*, all other things being equal, journalists prefer to use sources in

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[160] Gans, H. J. 1980. P. 128.

[161] Bennett, W. L. *News: The Politics of Illusion.* Longman Inc. New York. 1983. P. 22.

official positions of authority and responsibility; *articulateness*, when sources are interviewed they must to able to make their point as concisely, and preferably as dramatically, as possible.[162]

Information not drawn from dominant groups is less likely to meet the needs of the press in terms of format and information gathering practises. While information not originally appropriate for the press format is poured into a premoulded form with sources being used for the observation and description of developments which are not manifested in events. Examples of this include developments as socioeconomic trends, swings in public opinion, and shifts in local thinking.

The dependence on sources results in individuals becoming surrogates for institutions in the minds of the reporter and the newspaper readership.[163] Identifiable individuals come to stand for groups, institutions, and their policy values as they symbolise the impersonal in the news.[164] The personification of an organisation frames explanations within questions which tend to ask who was responsible rather than what occurred.[165] This is evidenced by the political experiences of New Zealand under the leadership of Winston Peters and the Alliance under Jim Anderton. The activities of each party are aligned so closely with their leader that to many they are perceived as mere extensions of their leaders.

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[162] Gans, H. J. 1980. P. 128 - 131.

[163] Gans, H. J. 1980. P. 14.

[164] ibid P. 14.

[165] ibid P. 15.

The personification of news is evidenced by Gans who found that less than ten percent of all stories he studied were about abstractions, objects or animals. An American study found that as a consequence of the reporters' social location, news gathering routines, and journalistic conventions, nearly half of the sources for all national and foreign news stories were government officials.[166]

5.4 Alternative views

The press impose an authorised view because by being confronted with a bureaucratically constructed universe they can only reproduce bureaucratic constraints for public consumption.[167] The reporter is forced to work within a framework which only allows them to function as a conduit for the flow of information from sources.[168]

The view of powerful political and economic actors dominates the news, while the concerns of groups outside the mainstream are typically ignored and presented in negative ways.[169] A wide-ranging coverage of diverse viewpoints and experiences is avoided in favour of extensive coverage of official positions and mainstream perspectives.[170] This creates the impression there are few serious alternatives to mainstream politics and lifestyles.[171] Who is represented as a source suggests, through its relegation to a minor role, and by omission, who is excluded from having a say in

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[166] Bennett, W. L. 1983. P. 12.

[167] Erickson, R.V. *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto. Date. P. 8.

[168] ibid. P. 8.

[169] Bennett, W. L. 1983. P. 7.

[170] ibid. P. 7.

[171] ibid. P. 7.

important matters.[172] Recognised sources are in a position to explain, evaluate, and

recommend appropriate responses to behaviours that have been designated as deviant

within the prevailing cultural criteria of rational acceptability.[173] The press also,

therefore, join with key source organisations to represent the authoritative apparatus

of society by designing deviance and promoting social control.[174]

The business prerogative to maximise profits recognised that it is more profitable to

personalise the packaging of the news than to produce many distinct products.[175] To

capture large segments of the mass market the press efficiently sell the same thing,

packaged personally but which appeals to the same underlying images. This allows

the press to deliver an audience to advertisers through the production of news which

fits the audience's social image, lifestyle, and daily schedule.

In this context an alternative and diverse range of sources which offer a critique is

considered to be represented by by groups which are in fact complicit members drawn

from the same framework and orientation. This affects the quality and quantity of

opposition voices that reach the readers. Bennett states that

> 'the main effect of normalised news is obvious: it narrows the range of
>
> acceptable, even 'thinkable', models for political action. This
>
> narrowing effect often goes unnoticed because the news always seems

[172] Erickson, R.V. 1989. P. 4.

[173] ibid. P. 4.

[174] ibid. P. 5.

[175] Bennett, W. L. 1983. P. 3.

filled with conflicts and competing viewpoints. Nevertheless, there is almost always a line drawn between legitimate and illegitimate dissent.'[176]

The coherency of source derived stories creates a cycle of perpetuation in which continued exposure to a coherent theme limits the individual's consciousness. The populations perception of what is news is not what happens, but what someone says will happen, or has happened. Those who structure society are, therefore, able to legitimise an ideology and their position within it by excluding alternative views and the populations ability to conceive their potentialities. As an elite tied to all other elites the newspaper proprietors benefit from the legitimisation of a community and the stature it grants them.

In effect, the news works to further remove the individual from the immediate experience and to push political consciousness permanently into the realm of fiction.[177] The individual is granted little grasp of the political power structures, without this it is virtually impossible to understand how the political system really works.[178] Power structures become a mystical realm populated by actors who have political force, or do not, and the individual abandons political analysis in favour of accepting what the structures project.[179]

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[176] Bennett, W. L. 1983. P. 3.

[177] Bennett, W. L. 1983. P. 7.

[178] Bennett, W. L. 1983. P. 13.

[179] ibid. P. 13.

Parenti states that consequently 'most people have neither the awareness not the opportunity to construct values and models which transcend the familiar arrangements of the dominant political culture.[180,] For example, comment on a government initiative is likely to be rebutted by the opposition parties which belong to the same institutionalised political structure. All discussion, debate and argument conducted within the pages of newspapers therefore occurs within socially prescribes and defined bounds.

This illusion is held in place through an appeal to objectivity. The journalistic convention of objectivity allows reporters and their sources to hide behind a veil by holding that an individual journalist's interpretation or version of events should not be the basis of news. The significance of this convention lies in the importance of press stories maintaining an illusion of objectivity so as to preserve the prestige of the news account. Keeping the reporter, explicitly at least, out of the news story necessitates the use of sources as interpreting spokespeople. Gans writes that objectivity is reinforced by the necessity to protect journalistic credibility. If the content of newspapers are not perceived as objective by the public the stories could be criticised as resulting from journalistic bias and the news would be seen as untrustworthy and unreliable.[181]

Objectivity is beneficial for the press because it offers easily employed guidelines for selection and leaves the responsibility for content to sources. This frees reporters from

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[180] Bennett, W. L. 1983. P. 45.

[181] Gans, H. 1990. P. 186.

the need to acquire expert knowledge by placing the emphasis on technique rather than substance.[182]

Objections to objectivity fall into two categories: that objectivity is impossible and it makes little sense, in consequence, to measure it; and that it is undesirable and should not be treated as a positive performance norm. A summary of the objections reads as, first, the unavoidable process of news selection must entail subjective judgement. Second, all events and reports of events are to an extent meaningless without placement in wider frames of reference which give them evalutative meanings. Third, of equal importance to what is news is what is not news. This reflects implicit and subjective judgements about the relevance and assumptions about society and its values. Four, news is always produced within a context of numerous and powerful external and internal pressures which are almost bound to deflect journalism from any ideal goal of recounting truth. Five, there is no objective reality 'out there' to report on and the best we can expect is no more than different versions of a multifarious set of impressions.[183]

Gans states that in the most critical view of objectivity the practise is viewed as willingly serving the interests of agents of the established order and as reinforcing a consensus which mainly protects class and power interests.[184] The news is presented in a personalised manner which examines the microcosm of a specific event without

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[182] Gans, H. 1990. P. 183.

[183] Gans, H . 1990. P. 186.

[184] Gans, H. 1990. P. 182.

reference to a 'big picture' perspective that provides a world view of surrounding issues and events.[185] An emphasis on the human angles to major news stories reduces significant events to terms of small proportion. That is: social forces are often represented through private experiences; economic analysis is frequently reduced to reports of isolated financial successes and failures; and individual actors often overshadow the issues they represent.

News organisations and the public are involved more in a process of creating convenient fictions than discovering convincing facts.[186] Bennett observes that we are all engaged in the same enterprise of making analogies and metaphors, of making evocations and representations of what we can recognise as appropriately human. The amassing of mutually validating facts simultaneously accomplishes the doing of newswork and reconstitutes the world as historically given.

5.5 Public Relations

The growth of public relations evidences the manner in which the relationiship between the press and the organisation and agencies it reports on has become increasingly aligned in partnership.To understand the role of public relations and its relationship with the press it is necessary to discuss and define the concept and characteristics of public relations. In doing so Grunig's (1989) application of systems theory to public relations, prominent industry definitions and apolitical analysis of what public relations entails will be utilised.

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[185] Bennett, W. L. Longman Inc. New York. 1983. P. 7.

[186] Bennett, W. L. 1983. P. 26.

Public relations has developed during the five post war decades into an important and prominent New Zealand industry. It's significance is symptomatic of a modern society in which technological and social change have created conditions which require specialised communication techniques in the public arena. Individual's and organisations must take care to distribute information to the media through appropriate strategies to ensure their message is communicated effectively

The influential role public relations plays is reflected in a high public profile. The term 'public relations' was once considered jargon but has moved into common usage.[187] In a thesis titled *Public Relations in Central Government in New Zealand* (1993) Walker comments that

> 'The importance of its role can be recognised from the fact that most
> corporations and organisations including charities, sports clubs and
> educational institutions now employ someone responsible for public
> relations.'[188]

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[187] Walker, S. *Public Relations in Central Government in New Zealand.* 1993. P. 1.
[188] ibid. P. 1.

Growth in public relations is evidenced by a survey of the profession by Peart,

Crothers and Powell which found that seventy-four percent of respondents held newly

created positions.[189]

Public relations has proved a difficult term to adequately define. That authors have

found it an elusive concept is illustrated by the different definitions that can be found

in almost every book on the subject. Despite a general lack of coherence there are,

however, definitions which have attained prominence within the industry and are

useful tools in a discussion of public relations.

In its broadest sense public relations is about communication. Public relations can be

described as the interface between groups in society and should be understood as a

collective terms[190] which represents the range of measures and actions taken by

organisations, corporations and individuals to ensure that both internal and external

communication works to their benefit.[191]

Harlow constructed a composite definition of public relations by drawing four

hundred and seventy-two definitions into a single statement. Although compromised

by its inflated and clumsy nature it is a useful reference as it incorporates and

explicitly describes the components fundamental to public relations. It reads,

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[189] Crothers, C. Powell, M. & Peart, J. *Public Relations Practioners Survey (Preliminary Report).* University of Auckland: Department of Sociology. Working Papers in Comparative Sociology, No. 21. 1991. P. 11.

[190] Macnamara, J. Peart, J. The New Zealand public relations handbook. Dunmore Press. Palmerston North. 1996. P. 14.

[191] Walker, S. 1993. P. 2.

'Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps to

establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding,

acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics;

involves the management of issues or problems; helps management to

keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and

emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public

interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively manage

change, serving as an early warning system to anticipate trends; and

uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its

principle tools.'

Harlows definition asserts that for an activity to be considered public relations it must

have a research component, should be planned with a purpose and objectives and is a

two-way process of mutual communication between the organisation and the public.

A more succinct definition incorporating each fundamental element is provided by the

Mexican statement which resulted from the World Assembly of Public Relations

Associations held in Mexico City in 1978.[192] The Assembly declared that,

'Public relations practise is the art and social science of analysing

trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisational

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[192] Nobel, L. W. *Fundamentals of Public Relations: Professional Guidelines, Concepts and Interactions.* Pergamon Press, Inc. New York. 1974. P. 29.

leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which will

serve both the organisation's and public interests.'

The intent of the Mexican statement is reflected in most other definitions of public

relations. Such as Cutlip, Centre and Broom's operational definition which states

'Public relations is the management function which evaluates public

attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an organisation with

the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn

public understanding and acceptance.'[193]

The Public Relations Institute of New Zealand has adopted one of the more widely

used definitions of public relations and one popular with other national institutes.[194] In

its statement of 'Constitution and Rules' the Institute declares that

'Public relations shall be defined as the deliberate, planned and

sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and

excellent communication between an organisation and its publics.'

Public relations has existed as a vital component of human interaction since the first

communities were established. Noble suggests that,

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[193] Macnamara, J. Peart, J. 1996. P. 11.

[194] Macnamara, J. Peart, J. 1996. P. 11.

'Public relations began as soon as there was a public; because as soon as their was a public, someone undoubtedly wanted to influence it's opinion. It is quite possible that public relations goes back to the stone-age.'[195]

There are many early examples of the use of formal public relations. A 4,000 year old cuneiform tablet has been found in Iraqi which is a bulletin telling farmers how to grow better crops, while Julius Ceasar wrote his Commentaries on the Gallic Wars to convince the citizens of Rome he has a great leader.[196]

Public relations is a fundamental dynamic of human interaction. From society's inception historical figures have enticed others to their cause through a variety of strategies. These have ranged from the quiet fireside grunts of the stone age and speeches in the village market day through the advent of the press and political pamphlets and to the development of the newspaper and broadcast media.

The first acknowledged public relations practitioner was Ivy Lee. Lee was a newspaper reporter who made his name and started a profession in 1906 by 'the simple but effective ruse of telling people what they wanted to know.[197] He placed great emphasis on policy and management's responsibility for that policy, established the necessity of two-way communication with the public, and taught his clients that listening was as important as talking.[198] Lee's actions set a precedent for a press

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[195] Nobel, L. W. 1974. P. 29.

[196] ibid. P. 29.

[197] Nobel, L. W. 1974. 218 - 219.

[198] Nobel, L. W. 1974. P. 37.

which was to expand until it included virtually every country in the world and embraced many other media in addition to the press.[199]

The importance of public relation's role in society has evolved as technological advances have bonded the world community. The barriers and segregations which the world's geographical contours imposed on the first communities have been overcome as technology has fundamentally altered notions of proximity. Political and economic actors whose predecessors were content with packed halls are now able to broadcast to a potential audience, or cliental, of millions. The speed with which information is transported around the globe means that individuals know what is going on and are therefore able to influence proceedings. This creates the need for control of the information they receive.

Systems theory proposes that a set of individual objects or entities often interrelate to form a system. A system contains four elements: objects which are parts or members of a set; the attributes of the system and objects; the environment in which the system exists; and the relationship between and among objects in the system, and the system and the environment.

Grunig's application of systems' theory to public relations produced four public relations communication models. The models each represent a set of values, goals, and behaviours of an organisation when practising public relations.[200]

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[199] Nobel, L. W. 1974. P. 219.

[200] Walker, S. 1993. P. 6.

Models one and two use one-way communication and the focus is on orientating

target audiences to the organisation.[201] The aim is not for the organisations to change

their actions but to gain compliance from the public. The research used by these

models is informal and minimal. Model two disseminates information which is

generally accurate but does not volunteer negative information. Grunig estimates

model one constitutes fifteen percent of the public relations market, while model two

makes up fifty percent of the market.

Models three and four involve two-way communication between the organisation and

the public and exhibit mutual adaptation. In model three mutual adaptation occurs

between the organisation and the public but the goals and needs of the organisation

remain primary. Research is used to identify attitudes, values and actions in the which

enable the tailoring of a message likely to produce public support. Grunig states that

twenty percent of the market adhere ot this model.

Model four is considered by Grunig to be fundamentally different from the other

models as its purpose is to manage conflict and promote mutual understanding,

through two-way communication resulting from formative research which evaluates

understanding. Grunig estimates that fifteen percent of the public relations market

uses this model. Proponents argue that the two-way symmetric model raises public

relations to a higher, more ethical plane.[202]

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[201] Walker, S. 1993. P. 5 - 7.

[202] Walker, S. 1993. P. 8.

Grunig's models have been subjected to criticism on several fronts. The principle

criticism, as stated by Macnamara, involves claims that the models are not 'real

world' as few organisation are prepared to change to fit their environment, rather,

most employ public relations to manipulate attitudes in their favour. Macnamara goes

on to quote Grunig as acknowledging that 'few organisation practise the two-way

Symmetric Model because their world view of public relations does not include that

model and they seldom have public relations personnel with the experience to practise

it.

This criticism is reinforced by an attitude that it is the role of the press to provide a

holistic assessment of an issue. A role that has patently been shown as unfulfilled.

Cutlip and Centre state that 'presenting all sides of an issue and providing an objective

balanced appraisal of the merits of conflicting views is a responsibility of the media,

not the practitioners.[203]

Murphy states that even advocates of symmetric communication admit it is extremely

rare in actual practise, and proposes a game theory where public relations is a mixed-

motive game rather that a zero-sum game.[204] She proposes a 'sliding scale of co-

operation and competition in which organisational needs must of necessity be

balanced against the constituents' needs, but never lose their primacy.[205] Macnamara

[203] Cutlip, S. & Center, A. *Effective Public Relations*. 5th edition. Prentice Hall. N. J. 1978. P.579.

[204] Murphy, P. *Limits of Symmetry*. Public Relations Research Annual, Volume 3. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 1991. P. 120.

[205] ibid. P. 120.

summarises this in simple terms as a mixed motive game which positions public

relations on a sliding scale off activity somewhere between pure conflict and pure

symmetry.[206]

In considering public relations it is useful to examine the functions of public relations,

as ultimately 'public relations defines itself by what it does.[207]' The concept of macro

communication, as proposed by Pearson and Macnamara, describes the sum of an

organisation's communication with the macro environment composed of all groups

with an interest in the organisations activities.[208] Macro communication is most

notably composed of advertising, marketing, and a diverse range of communication

strategies which are generally grouped under the heading of public relations.

The Public Relations Institute of New Zealand lists the activities of public relations

as; opinion research; press agency; product promotion; publicity; lobbying; public

affairs; fund raising and membership drives; and special events management.

In performing these activities practitioners may utilise an increasing range of

techniques and strategies to achieve their goals.

Press relations is one of the many communication strategies that sit under the

umbrella term 'public relations'. It involves organisations participating in press

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[206] Macnamara, ?. 1993. P. 13.

[207] Cutlip, S. & Center, A. *Effective Public Relations.* 1980.

[208] For example - groups such as as customers, consumer groups, pressure groups, government, regulatory bodie.

relations by fostering a relationship with the press in the expectation that a

concomitant relationship with the public will naturally result. The symbiotic nature of

this relationship allows organisations acting as press sources to influence the

information that is communicated to the press, and therefore the public.

A plethora of techniques exist in the public relations spectrum by which organisations

are able to act as sources. The use of a press releases is one of these strategies and of

particular interest because of its importance as an information source that is

communicated directly to the press.

Chapter six

Case Study

Chapter six provides a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of business reporting in the metroploitan press. Newspaper coverage of the two dominant companied in the New Zealand forestry industry, Fletcher Challenge Limited and Cartre Holt Harvey Limited, was analysed over a nine week period to provide a measure of the media profile they were able to achieve. The study establishes a context in terms of press coverage, press release use, and discusses the correlation between release and article content. The findings draw into question the quality of business reporting in the press, with implications for corporate organisations, the press, and the public.

The economy is of fundamental importance as it interacts with social and political structures to define the conditions in which society functions. The social environment it establishes dictates the behaviour of the individual in both their private and public lives by establishing how they may satisfy their material wants.[209] Economic news is concerned with a range of issues as it does not function in splendid isolation but as part of a living social organism. It is thereby a component of many stories that are not directly of an economic nature. Many political and social stories at local and national levels a degree of economic analysis is fundamental to an understanding of an issue.

6.1 The study

This study focuses on the level of business reporting in the metropolitan press. The aim is to establish the nature and quality of business reporting to determine if the importance of business to the economy and society is reflected in a commensurate level of business reporting. The importance of business to society is evidenced by the influence it weilds over the individual as the driving force of the economy.

The study sample

The sample of corporate organisations is comprised of Fletcher Challenge Limited and Carter Holt Harvey Limited. These organisations were targeted because of their prominance in terms of media comment, which enabled the production of comprehensive data. The data is qualified in that it cannot be considered statistically representative of the business news in totality, however, it should be acknowledged that the findings do indicate trends that are applicable in a wider context. This sample does not consider the activities of divisional offices of the organisation who may use releases to comment on divisional activities.

Methodology

The data from which this study evolved has been gathered from the metropolitan daily newspapers over a nine week period from June 12 to August 19 in 1995. All newspaper articles concerning the corporate organisations Fletcher Challenge Limited and Carter Holt Harvey Limited published in the New Zealand Herald, The Dominion, The Evening Post, The Press and the Otago Daily Times were clipped for analysis.

Description of companies

Fletcher Challenge has evolved into New Zealand's largest company with operations

in Australia, Asia, the United Kingdom, North America and South America with

interests in pulp and paper, energy, building and solid wood plantation forestry. In the

annual report of 30 June 1995 Fletcher Challenge, comprised of the Forestry and

Ordinary Divisions, declared total group assets of $13,261 million, a combined

turnover of $8,401 million and net earning of $464 million.[210] In recent years Fletcher

Challenge has been associated with the prominant personalities of its recent chairman,

Sir Ronald Trotter, and its recent Chief Executive Officer, Hugh Fletcher.

Carter Holt Harvey has also developed into one of the largest companies in New

Zealand with its business groups titled Forest and Wood Products, Pulp Paper and

Tissue, Packaging, Building Products and Distribution, with additional investments in

associated companies. In its 30 June 1995 Annual Report Carter Holt Harvey

announced total group assets of $7,527 million and net earnings of $445 million.[211]

The public profile of Carter Holt Harvey is dominated by the Chairman of the Board

of Directors, Wilson Winnery.

Description of newspapers

The New Zealand press is dominated by five metropolitan dailies that are based in

four geographic centres and have a combined circulation of 504,851.[212]

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[210] A publication of Fletcher Challenge Limited. Ordinary Division, Shareholder Briefing. 30 June, 1995. P.9.

[211] Released by Carter Holt Harvey. Financial Results for the Quarter ended 30 June, 1995.

[212] Ownership of press media , in terms of circulation, for the year ended 1 March 1995. Information About Newspapers. The Newspaper Publishers Association of N.Z. (Inc). P.3. 1994.

New Zealand Herald

The Auckland based newspaper, the *New Zealand Herald* is New Zealand's largest newspaper with a circulation of 246,092.

The Dominion

One of two Wellington newspapers *The Dominion* is owned by Independent Newspapers Limited and has a circulation of 66,009.

The Evening Post

The second Wellington daily, and the only major evening newspaper in New Zealand, *The Evening Post* is also owned by Independent Newspapers limited with a circulation of 71,092.

The Press

The largest South Island newspaper the Christchurch based *The Press* is owned by Independent Newspapers and has a circulation of 102,066.

Otago Daily Times

Independently owned, the Dunedin based *Otago Daily Times* has a circulation of 50,260.

6.1 Part one - Levels of coverage

The average edition of a metropolitan newspaper contains 145.57 stories. The average number of sports and racing stories in each edition was 28.66 (19.72%) and the average number of business stories was 16.72 (11.48%). See Table One

An analysis of the level of newspaper coverage provides a general context which enables an informed consideration of the qualities of business reporting. The average sample edition contained 145.57 stories, *The Press* printed the highest number of stories with 182, and *The Evening Post* contained the lowest with 124.66.

The average number of business stories was 16.72 in each edition which represents 11.48% of total newspaper stories. The range of data was high, with The Press running an average of 25 stories and The New Zealand Herald, operating in the nations business centre, running substantially less stories with an average of 7.3 stories. A comparison with the number of sports and racing stories provides a significant insight into the priority metropolitan newspapers allocate to each department. The average number of sports and racing stories was 28.66 which constitutes 19.72% of total stories. This represents an output which is 82.5% greater than business stories.

The level of business reporting indicates that the press's interpretation of newsworthiness criteria does not recognise the credentials of the corporate sector. Masterton's core elements and international news criteria do not by definition exclude the reporting of corporate activity, but if gate-keepers apply this interpretation then corporate news will not be reported. It should be noted that the business stories data does not include stories concerning business which were included in general news stories on issues such as the economy and unemployment.

The average business department has a relatively small staff of three. This represents

7.9% of total reporters while the average sports and racing department has a staff of

six, which is 15.89% of total reporters.

A newspapers interpretation of what constitutes newsworthiness manifests in its

allocation of resources and is reflected in the quality and quantity of business

reporting. A fundamental measure of resource allocation is provide by staffing levels

which reinforces the conclusion that business reporting lacks a significant emphasis in

the press.

The primary influence of low staffing levels in business departments is to determine

the level of output. The average edition of a metropolitan newspaper contains 16.72

stories which are produced by three reporters writing an on average 5.24 stories each.

These stories are a blend of original and reconstituted articles with the newsroom's

own stories being supplemented by business articles taken from the wires of press

agencies such as NZPA, Reuters, AAP, and AP.

In addition, a lack of departmental resources has an influence on the quality of

business articles. A department which functions in an environment characterised by

time and resource constraints may be compromised in its ability to perform tasks

which ensure the production of quality articles - such as the verification of facts and

the consultation of a range of sources. This results in the potential for articles to be

published that lack perception, depth, accuracy and balance.

The lack of resources in the business department creates an opportunity for organisations which are geared towards providing stories to the press to insert their information which little checking or modification.

Fletcher Challenge Limited and Carter Holt Harvey were the subject of a significant percentage of business story coverage with an average of 69 stories being written about each organisation.

One hundred and thirty-eight press articles were published in total during the sample period with an average of sixty-nine articles concerning each organisation. Fletcher Challenge Limited (FCL)commanded an unusually high level of media attention with 84 articles, compared to 54 Carter Holt Harvey (CHH) articles. This translated to each organisation being the subject of an average of one press article each day in one metropolitan. Individual newspapers published on average 0.2 articles concerning each organisation each day, or a story every five days.

The one hundred and thirty-eight articles were published on fifty-seven distinct subject topics. Individual topics were identified by a comparison of article content similarities and differences. This translates into 2.4 articles being written about each topic. Assuming each newspaper writes one story on each topic this means that individual topics concerning Fletcher Challenge Limited and Carter Holt Harvey reach almost half of the nations readers.

The level of corporate representation in the press seems disproportionately low but

within that figure CHH and FCL achieve a relatively high profile. This public profile

reflects the size of the companies. FCL and CHH are two of the largest companies in

New Zealand and as such attract a concomitant degree of interest. In addition, CHH

has attracted attention through its involvement in the 'Winebox' commission of

inquiry.

6.3 Part two - the success of press releases

Part two evaluates the success of press releases according to three measures. First, the

number of press releases that were released by the organisations. Second, the number

of press releases that were successful in creating press coverage. Third, the number of

press articles created by press releases that were successful. It also examines the role

of press associations in the success of press releases.

FCL and CHH produced an average of nine press releases in the nine week sample.

The topic of these releases were principally concerned with: shares, general

developments, credit ratings and facilities, and profits.

The press release is one communications technique in an overall public relations

strategy. A primary measure of the importance of press releases in this strategy in the

modern public relations environment is provided by how often a release is used.

Eighteen press releases were issued during the sample period - an average of 9 press

releases produced by each organisation. A press release issued on the last day of the

sample was excluded as it could not produce stories in the sample period. This translates to each organisation producing one release every week. FCL, with twelve press releases, 1.33 a week, produced more releases than CHH which issued six releases, 0.67 a week.

A press release is an appropriate and successful method of communicating information in certain circumstances. It is an efficient technique which should be used when information to be communicated is of significance in its own right and appeals in its present form to the values of newsworthiness and, therefore, does not require 'dressing-up' as an event. Press releases should not be used when they are inappropriate as an unnecessary flood of information to the media may result in potentially valuable information being ignored in a wash of excessive and unnewsworthy promotion.

The most common topic of press releases was found to be shares, which were the subject of 5 releases, general developments were the subject of 4 releases, while credit ratings and facilities were the focus of 3 releases. Two releases were concerned with issues in the media and one release announced a new position. These releases were characterised by an administrative tone in which the public were informed of information of which they should have been aware.

The study found 66.6% of press releases were successful in creating at least one story in the metropolitan press.

The most basic measurement of press release success is the number of press releases taken-up by the press. A success rate of 66.6% represents fifteen out of eighteen press releases creating some level of press coverage. CHH was successful with four of six releases while FCL succeeded with eight of twelve releases. The releases that were not successful indicate that releases concerning issues that have become part of the media agenda and/or that involve other organisations are less likely to be used as a primary source of information. The unsuccessful releases concerned a credit rating upgrade that had been announced previously by Standard and Poor's and a strike at the Kinleith Mill which was subject to comment by a variety of interested parties. The 4 FCL releases that failed to attract press attention concerned a detailed statement concerning an adjusted profit forecast in light of drilling results and an associates financial report, and two statements which provided background information concerning the Forests Division and plans to build market position.

An average of 3.33 press articles were created by the press releases which were successful.

The most important measure of a press release's success is the number of stories it creates. The twelve press releases produced forty stories in the press at an average strike rate of 3.33 per release. If it is considered that a newspaper is likely to produce only one story based on a release then this represents a strike rate of 66% across the five metropolitan newspapers. FCL was particularly successful with its ten releases creating twenty-eight articles at an average of 3.5 while CHH produced twelve stories from 4 releases at an average of 3. The *Dominion* carried the highest number of

release initiated stories with twelve, with the *The New Zealand Herald* carrying

eleven and *The Press* running 8 release orientated stories. *The Evening Post* and

Otago Daily Times carried significantly fewer release derived stories with 5 and 4

respectively.

Press releases issued from the organisation's head office were responsible for 40 of

the 138 articles, representing 28.98% of total articles. It should be noted that this

figure does not provide an indication of stories that may have been initiated by the

organisations in ways this study has not measured. This sample considers releases

issued from the head office when each company is comprised of several divisions

which are authorised to issue press releases as they consider necessary. In addition,

stories may have been initiated through other communication channels such as press

conferences, phone calls, etc.

These results indicate how resources, or lack of, define the manner in which a

newsroom is able to gather information. A newsroom that is well resourced is able to

assert its own agenda and a pro-active approach, while a newsroom that is under-

resourced is unable to impose itself and must accumulate information in a passive

manner. A passive environment creates conditions in which organisations are able to

distribute press releases in the expectation that this will result in press articles. This

creates opportunities which public relations companies and corporate organisations

are able to take advantage of by producing releases tailored to appeal to conventions

of newsworthiness and press article type presentation.

Former journalists are increasingly turning to public relations for reasons of employment and financial reward. They provide an insider's understanding of how a newspaper operates and the methods by which information may be dressed up to appeal to the newsroom's ethos and processes. A former journalist is able to mould information so that a release appeals to newsworthiness criteria and thereby has an improved chance of being picked-up by the press. A release that is presented in a form readily translated into a story is more likely to be run by the journalist as it may be efficiently written up as a story.

Press Associations, in particular the New Zealand Press Association, perform an important role in the success of press releases.

The NZPA performs a vital role in facilitating the success of press releases in creating press articles. A significant number of articles published by the press were provided by the NZPA, with thirteen of the forty-six stories initiated by press releases attributed to a press association, another six stories carryed a by-line and twenty-one carryed no attribution. In addition, a press association was cited on 30 other occasions in stories not created by a press release There may be further articles which have failed to cite a press association as the reporter feels the story has been modified to the extent that a citation is not needed.

The NZAP may act as a catalyst for the propagation of business articles that are direct representations of what the initiating organisation wishes to communicate. A press release's ability to influence increases exponentially as it is distributed throughout

New Zealand without a check on its quality. The New Zealand Press Association creates and distributes information in two main ways. First, it runs a newsroom that produces stories which are releases to member newspapers. Second, member newspapers submit stories to the NZPA which distributes them on their behalf to other members of the NZPA. The benefits provided by the NZPA are obvious, it facilitates efficiency in information gathering as newspapers with resources based predominantly in one city or town are able to provide national coverage without replicating resources.

Articles from press agencies are likely to be compromised in a manner analogous to that of a newspaper's own articles. Wire service articles originate in an environment similar to that of the newspaper, taking the stories as they are provided by member newspapers newsrooms and by agency reporters working under comparable restraints. The NZPA, therefore, places the reporter in a position to write a story for all member newspapers. This creates the danger that a poorly researched or written story may not be subject to additional checks by newspapers taking it from the wires. The responsibility lies with the receiving newspaper to clarify concerns but the potential exists for one piece of substandard piece of journalism to be exhibited throughout the country as a press release that successfully breaches the NZPA is able to filtrate through the entire press structure in New Zealand.

This process creates ethical issues, with the potential for direct copying, a failure to cite sources, and the inappropriate use of by-lines. It is inappropriate for a reporter to use a by-line if they have not been predominantly responsible for the writing of the

story. This study has found several examples of this being the case. It is also inappropriate for a release to be slightly altered and published as a story when its background is not cited. If information has been released by an organisation and appears in a practically uncensored and validated form it should be made apparent to the reader that this is the case.

6.4 Part three - content analysis

Part three evaluates the correlation between press release and press article content in two ways. First, the content of each press article was analysed to determine the influence of the press release in terms of press article content. Second, the information in each press article was evaluated to reveal what changes the reporter implemented when writing the article.

The initiating organisation was the dominant source of content in press articles - constituting 55% of content. The remainder of the average press article contained 45% that was not attributed or written by the reporter, and 10% was taken from an alternative source.

The content of press articles was attributed to one of three possible categories: the initiating organisation, the organisation that produced the release; an alternative source, comment from a business or sector commentator, a competing or effected organisation which is qualified to comment on the particular area of operations; reporter or unattributed, information which was attributed to an unnamed source or the reporter.

Initiating organisations are able to dominate press articles by providing 55% of content and because there is a lack of alternative comment. The finding that 55% of content is derived from the initiating organisation is not in itself an indication that the press release exerts undue influence on press article content. It is appropriate that the information released by the initiating organisation is the topic of the press release and the focus of the press article. This does enable, however, the press release to establish the framework for the press article and to apply a certain perspective to events.

The significance of the initiating organisation's contribution as an article source is augmented by only 10% of the article text being taken from alternative sources. Precedence being granted to the initiating organisation becomes problematic when its assertions are not qualified by measured responses by alternative sources but rather supplemented by unattributed information and reporter comment and padding. A single source is unlikely to produce an article with the depth and breath of comprehension that an article which provides a synthesis of primary and alternative perspectives can provide. A reporter may be able to assess an event independently but should utilise sources with a specific skill set and knowledge in a particular sphere to enhance their assertions and provide a balanced , accurate and fair representation.

A comprehensive process of consultation may include any individual or group with an interest in the sphere of activities under consideration, such as experts, competitors and regulatory bodies. Alternative sources provide the reporter with a check on the validity of information by confirming or challenging its accuracy and by raising

concerns and issues which the primary organisation may have neglected. Organisations which are driven by market priorities can not be expected to publicise the negative aspects of their activities.

The neglect of alternative sources produces articles which are shallow, one dimensional, and provide unsubstantiated individual assessments that are inappropriate except within the limited bounds of an editorial format. The consultation of alternative sources is a relatively straight-forward process in terms of both time and difficulty. A reporter, with access to a telephone, has access to a network of sources and should be able to contact the appropriate individuals for comment in a particular instance within deadline constraints. On occasions, contacting a source may prove difficult, but in many cases, however, the reporter may contact the relevant players and commentators within minutes of the initiating release being received.

The press must mediate between the role organisations consider they should play and the role the public perceives them to play. The data shows that a lack of source balance provides fertile conditions for public relations practitioners to convey their messages effectively.

Of the information from a press release included in a press article 55% is 'rewritten'. A comparatively small 10% of the story is quoted 'verbatim' from the release, 205 of the release is used 'in-part' in expanded or clarified form, while additional contact resulted in 15% of story content.

Information from the initiating press release was drafted into the press article in three ways. First, content was considered to be 'verbatim' if information was taken from the release without change. Second, content was considered to be 'rewritten' if information taken from the release was altered by the changing of a few words, that is, less that 20% of the total under consideration. Third, content was considered to be 'in-part' if information from a release was combined with and/or expanded on by other sources of information. Information from the release must constitute more than 40% of the total under consideration to be defined as 'in-part'.

In addition, 15% of the articles taken from releases contained content which was gained, in response to the release, through additional contact with the organisation. A likely scenario for this contact is for a reporter to contact the organisation to seek clarification or expansion of the release's information. Additional contact was considered to have occurred when statements, not from the release but from the organisation's representatives, were quoted or rewritten in the article.

That 10% of press article content is transposed verbatim from a release would seem to indicate that articles are composed from a range of information and are not dependent hybrids derived from releases. Elucidated in a wider context, however, this illusion is shattered as it becomes apparent that this figure is not indicative of an aversion to the utilisation of press release content but rather reveals an attempt to conceal significant levels of dependence.

The results reflect a tendency for reporters to rearrange the text of press releases in the content of their articles rather than to reproduce it as obviously verbatim. The combined contribution of verbatim and rewritten text is 65%, which represents a significant proportion of the story. To rearrange text is the most expedient method a reporter has of producing articles without appearing to be dependent on information drawn from press releases. The public relations consultant's role is to maximise the potential of this window of opportunity by providing reporters with information in a readily palatable format which is able to pass through the newsroom with little modification.

These results reflect the close relationship the press and corporate organisations have developed. One in which corporate organisations are able to determine to a large and significant measure the context of press articles concerning their activities.

Chapter seven

Summary and conclusion

The press play a pivotal role in propagating the social conditions which frame society. Evidence supporting this view has been drawn from a variety of social, economic and political perspectives and philosophies. The starting point for this view is provided by Marx and what has become known as the Marxist perspective. This perspective considers the press to be one of a host *of ideological state apparatuses* which together mould the individual's convictions into a world view that replicates prevailing social norms. The key characteristic of the press as an ideological state apparatus is it's ability to appear as a diverse, independent and autonomous actor while functioning as a socialising agent of the dominant social order.

Individuals acting in ways and accepting conditions in society which do not serve their own interests indicates they are unaware of what their interests are. This indicates individuals function under conditions *of false consciousness* in which what they perceive as a pluralist and open-minded consciousness of society is actually a limited and constrained conception of what is possible.

Cognitive schema theory shows how the individual's cognitive suitability is constrained by the structures utilised to make sense of the world. These structures are put in place during the initial years of the individual's life and thereafter establish a pattern of attribution as the individual makes sense of the world by ordering,

comprehending, and behaving in fulfilment of this embedded framework of understanding. Information that doesn't sit easily within these parameters is rejected. The social conditions individuals' experience during their initial exposure to society are representations of society's dominant conditions and thereafter define the individual's conception of the world.

Symbolism and *ritual* define who the individual is and form the basis for meaningful action. Individuals assign a common symbolism which substitutes a meaningful image for what the community wishes to address. Icons, words, rituals, myths and conditioned reflexes work to impose a formalised logic on the emotional and physical sensations of the world. The manner in which symbolism and rituals are defined by society provides a framework which determines how the world is perceived by limiting the way in which individuals are able to conceive of the world which surrounds them.

Analysis of *media ownership patterns* in society shows how the dominant groups which benefit from existing social conditions are the owners of the media. And further, this link shows how the central position of the media in the community allows these groups to continue conditions which serve their interests. The media use shared images that emphases how the dominant groups wish things to be portrayed - such as, a focus on how things are consumed rather than looking closely at how they are produced which would emphases the different role groups of people perform. Only those who are financially strong, and are thereby members of the dominant group,

aggree and are able to prosper, and therefore excludes alternative views which do not affirm social conditions as being naturally right.

The need to make and consolidate financial positions by making money leads to tactics of audience maximisation which targets the social middle ground which further limits media content. News is therefore unthreatening and unchallenging to the beliefs of the audience and therefore supports the status quo.

Coleridge's evaluation of the owners of the media illustrates that owners in the media sphere belong to the same social, political, and economic grouping as owners of other industries. There are significant linkages between owners of the media and other members of dominant groups - they sit as directors on each other's boards, fund each other's ventures, and dine together.

The social responsibility model guides the press by binding it's interests to those of the community. By being duty bound to support the values of the community the press is committed to supporting the actors who are responsible for forming the community. As one of the governing dynamics of the community is the role of work in the individual's life the press must therefore support this arrangement, and thereby support the regime which dominates society. The press can not, therefore, challenge the values inherent in society but may debate contrived or perceived points of difference. The press educate and inform - but it educates and informs a particular perspective. The community is therefore educated and informed of the Lockean perspective which sanctifies the dominant relations.

Analysis of newsvalues has shown news values are value laden as concepts of newsworthiness are defined by their interpretation. There is a tendency for these characteristics to be defined by the financial prerogatives of a newspaper organisation and propagates through internal newspaper structures.

The press grants the existing social structures an authority which these structures hold up as evidence of their natural place in the world. In turn the structures look to the press as a guardian of society which provides the press with the authority required for it to perform it's role with creditability. Society implicitly considers those who have access to knowledge and information as having the status to be so. This allows the press to provide a version of the world which is accepted as correct. This credibility is maintained through an appeal to objectivity. The trumpeting of objectivity allows the press to defend its role by maintaining it provides a balanced view which reflects what others have said has happened - in reality this merely provides a lens through which those with access to the media are able to shine their particular light.

These arguments evidence the role of the press as an ideological state apparatus. The key point in this argument is that the press performs this role subconsciously. The press is a part of the limited consciousness of society, those who work in the media and those who own the media adhere to this belief and framework, and work in the course of fulfilling their roles to further propagate the beliefs inherent in what they do.

The case study illustrates the link between the media and the dominant groups in society. There can be no doubt dominant groups and companies have preferable access to the media, as indeed there can be no doubt this is the result of the structure of the media and the society in which it functions.

These results substantiate the relationship between market forces and the content of the press. This serves to illustrate the role of the press as an ideological state apparatus.

This has been evidenced through the findings of the case-study.

- *Business Stories are under-represented in Newspapers.*

- *Large companies make extensive use of press releases.*

- *Companies are successful in using media releases to attract press attention.*

- *The majority of press content in press articles is derived from media releases.*

- *Press stories are poorly balanced with little use of sources other than the initiating organisation.*

This is not the result of some conspiracy, and indeed those in the media would be shocked if this was implied. Within the bounds of the role they perform the media provide a balanced view, but the focus should be on the bounds which define this role.

What can we learn from this analysis of the New Zealand press? The press provide a valuable source of information which informs and educates readers as to what is

happening in, and of concern to, the community and it's members. The reader should be aware, however, of the role the press performs and what the press does, and does not, represent and that while the press represents one view and conception of society there are a range of other perspectives which can contribute to a more holistic view of society.

people should be aware the press is a business which is required to provide a return to its owners. The implications of this are that the representations of the press as primarily being a watchdog for society is false, but rather the press is focused on providing a product whose production expenses are outweighed by the revenue it creates. Constraints on expenses mean the press has a limited capacity to provide quality and quantity within it's pages.

What they are presented with in the pages of the press is skewed towards the major actors in the economic, social, and political groups so there are a host of other groups which find accessing the press difficult. The size and organisational ability of groups determines the level of press visibility. Groups which are not dominant in society are in this position because they do not conform to the beliefs which would enable them to become dominant groups, they may not want to be larger or organised. Readers should therefore be aware that there are large groups in society which do not conform to what is recognised but nevertheless represent significant interests.

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Tony Cronin - former President of the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand.

Barry Akers - representative of Fletcher Challenge Limited.

Bridget Wickam - representative of Carter Holt Harvey Limited.

Peter Diesel - former head of the communications Unit in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.