

# Special interests and the media

[Entertainment](#)



Culture, ideology, politics, and economics are linked in the output of media organization in way that is true for no other sector of capitalist enterprise

## Introduction

Although some might believe otherwise, the media is not a neutral or objective institution. It is rather a disputed space that can be manipulated to serve certain interests. McNair (2007: 103) affirms that “ culture, ideology, politics, and economics are linked in the output of media organisation.” This statement is especially true of the UK newspaper industry. McQuail (2008: 7) also argues that power structures social relationships and that this has an effect on the way the mass media is organized. Both historically and presently the influence of the media can be observed. Newspapers promote certain ideologies, create and reinforce cultural patterns, and greatly influence views on politics.

Media products that are made for mass consumption are often controlled by a handful of wealthy owners. This is very similar to what Karl Marx calls the ‘ bourgeoisie’ or the owners of the means of production. They are in control of factories and the livelihoods of workers. However, in much the same way, media production serves the interests of the few, and not those of the masses. The ruling class often determines the content of widely distributed newspapers.

In support of McNair, I will argue that media output is very closely linked to culture, ideology, and politics, in a way that is advantageous to those who own the means of production. In order to show this, I will discuss all factors (culture, ideology, politics, and economics) in relation to each other and

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analyse the influence that the newspaper industry has had historically on political, economic, and cultural affairs. The paper will mainly look at 18th century, 19th century, and present press and media output in Britain.

### Critical Analysis

The struggle over control of newspaper content is also an economic struggle between the bourgeoisie and the workers or the lower classes. This is a conflict that mirrors the Marxist notion of class struggle. Starting as far back as the 18th century, the UK ruling class has fought to destroy radical newspapers of the time, such as Poor Man's Guardian, Twopenny, and Republican. The aims of the radical press were to promote class organisations through the development of a critical political analysis. Class organizations and unions were meant to earn workers better wages and more rights. Thus, by developing radical newspapers, the working class sought to improve their economic condition. This is an example of the struggle between the aristocracy and the workers who were criticising corruption and the repressive taxation which was impoverishing them (Curran 2010: 13). Here, politics is also interrelated to the media and to economics. It was only through adopting a critical political analysis that workers could advocate for their rights. On the other hand, the politics of the right (or the wealthy owners) represent their economic interest of keeping the wealth and control of the press in the hands of few.

The emergence of more progressive publications in the early 1800s showed how the ideology of the ruling classes was in opposition of radicalism. Their politics served to prevent the workers from gaining more control of the

media output. Between 1830 and 1836 there was an increase in circulation of radical newspapers. In London alone, the readership grew from half a million to 2 million. Dr Philmore, a member of Parliament, complained that “ these infamous publications [...] inflame working people’s passions, and awaken their selfishness, contrasting their present condition with what they contented to be their future condition- a condition incompatible with human nature, and with those immutable laws which providence has established for the regulation of human society “ (Curran 2010 : 14). In other words, the rich believed that it is their right to maintain their social and economic standing. In response to radicalism, they sought to pass regulations that would control the media output. This implied that they could promote the views that would benefit their own economic and social condition. As already seen, those who can control media output use this resource to promote their ideology, culture, and politics. In this way, they also maintain their wealth.

In order to silence the voice of radical newspapers in the 1800s, the government decided to introduce the stamp duty, which meant that publications were redefined to include political periodicals. Curran and Seaton (2010) also note that during those days, the government sought to increase press taxation. This was to ensure that those in charge of the press are wealthy men of high social standing. Curran and Seaton explain that the reason behind stamp duty was “ to restrict the readership to a well to do by raising the cover price; and to restrict the ownership to the propertied class by increasing the publishing cost “ (Curran and Seaton 2010: 11). This shows how economics plays a big role in restricting those who do not have the necessary means from promoting their own ideology, politics, and culture.

The example clearly illustrates the link between economics, culture, and politics that McNair talks about. It also portrays, once again, how those who own the means of production can promote the ideologies that benefit them.

Over time, those who were financially in control of the media used this to their advantage and slowly began to take radicalism out of the picture. It became the norm that only those who have enough capital could have a say in politics and influence the ideology of the masses. In the late 19th century, when some control methods failed and stamp laws were repealed, the press establishment embarked on a “sophisticated strategy of social control”, where the radical newspapers were replaced by apolitical, commercial publications, read by mass audiences and controlled by capital (McNair 2009: 87). According to McNair (2009), the radical publications of the end of the 19th century had either been forced out of existence, moved right politically, or become small specialist publications. As newspapers became cheaper and the market expanded, capital investment and running costs increased beyond the capacity of radical publishers. Thus, radical voices were once again silenced. This shows that the output of news is greatly influenced by the ownership and capital, as only the wealthy are powerful enough to determine the course of media production.

Currently, it can be said that media output in the newspapers is still dependant on who owns the enterprise, what are their politics, and what kind of ideology and culture they want to promote. Oftentimes, the output does not necessarily reflect the truth, but rather takes the form that is best suited to serve the interests of the few. It is not uncommon for stories to be censored or even not published at all. To illustrate this, Anthony Bevins <https://assignbuster.com/special-interests-and-the-media/>

(1997: 47) argues that “ Journalists cannot ignore the pre-set ‘ taste ‘ of their newspapers, use their own sense in reporting the truth of the any event, and survive. They are ridden by news desks and backbenches executives, have their stories spiked on a systematic basis, they face the worst sort of newspaper punishment –byline deprivation.”

## Conclusion

The history of newspaper publishing in the UK shows that economic interests influence media output immensely. I have argued that, historically, culture, ideology, politics, and economics are all interrelated influences on the content of media. In order to show this, my paper has looked at historical events that have had an impact on the course that the media (especially newspapers) has taken during the past few hundred years. Starting with the 18th century, the press has been a battlefield between the rich and the poor. Radical newspapers fought to have a say in politics. Unfortunately, those who had more wealth and invested more capital were the ones able to take control of the press. With the control of the press also came the promotion of certain ideologies. The ruling class favoured the politics that went against the interests of the workers. Politicians and capitalists alike strived to protect their standing. The stamp duty is an example of measures that they were taking to ensure that radical media output does not grow enough to influence political views. Even though this measure did not last, the effect that commercialization has had on newspapers and media output, in general, is still evident. Those who own media corporations prefer an apolitical and commercial approach. Over time, the voices of workers with radical demands have stopped being heard in the mainstream media. Moreover, even the <https://assignbuster.com/special-interests-and-the-media/>

practices of journalists nowadays are influenced by this approach to media as a profit driven enterprise. The relevance of stories is often determined based on commercial appeal and sensationalism, rather than facts. Stories can be censored and facts hidden. Economics, as well as politics are mainly to blame for these developments. McNair (2009) sums up this interrelationship perfectly through his work. The fact that politics, economics, culture, and ideology play a big role in determining media output is undeniable. Although this is unlikely to change in the near future, it is important to know whose politics and interests influence what we read, hear, and see in the media.

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