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# Capitalists *vs.* the media: an analysis of an ideological mobilization among business leaders

PETER DREIER \*

## Introduction

Since the mid-1970s, the American business community has been engaged in an ideological mobilization, directed at the news media, to reverse a dramatic decline in public confidence in big business which they blame on the media. This mobilization is in response to what the business community perceives as the media's excessive focus on corporate wrongdoing. Those who view the news media as a 'tool' of big business may find this attitude and activity hard to understand.

This article is intended not only to explain business's perception of the media as hostile to corporate interests, but also to explain why business has felt the necessity to mobilize, and to spend large sums of money, to defend itself and try to pull in the reins on the news media.

This episode in business-media conflict also provides an opportunity to deal with an important theoretical issue regarding the degree of integration, and the capacity for political mobilization, within the capitalist class. For if the capitalist class cannot control 'its' media, then its ability to engineer mass consent—to avoid cracks in its ideological hegemony—becomes problematic.

## Debate over media autonomy

It is often said that the mass media is a 'tool' or an 'instrument' of the capitalist class. The media is viewed as one more weapon in the capitalist class's arsenal to maintain its 'ideological hegemony' and therefore its domination over subordinate classes. Its control over the mass media is viewed as self-conscious, intentional and direct.

Miliband (1977: 50), for example, concludes that 'whatever else the immense output of the mass media is intended to achieve, it is also intended to help prevent the development of class consciousness in the working class, and to reduce as much as possible any hankering it might have for a radical alternative to capitalism'.

Wolfe observes (1978: 124) that, 'Because the media are part of the capitalist system . . . it is not surprising that the media engage much of their time in preserving the existing state of affairs. They do this by being conscious propagandists for the system, by reinforcing indirect consciousness manipulation, and by not serving as an informative vehicle.'

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Parenti (1980: 170–171) notes that '(t)he business owned media have little to say about the relationship of the capitalist system to pollution, bad housing, poverty and inflation, the relations between political and business leaders, and the rôle of the multinational corporations in shaping American interventionist policy abroad'.

From these comments, one would have to agree with Westergaard (1979: 101) that '(l)eft-wing critics, of course, deny the media any such capacity for independence' from the capitalist class.

But, despite Westergaard's remarks, these and other scholars do recognize that the mass media, like the capitalist state, exercise a degree of autonomy from the capitalist class that allows them to pursue actions that impinge on the rights and privileges of the capitalist class.

Milliband acknowledges, for example, that the 'ideological terrain is by no means wholly occupied by "the ideas of the ruling class"'; it is highly contested territory' (Milliband, 1977: 54). Gouldner notes that the ideological institutions are specialized and operate according to their own set of principles. 'It is precisely because the hegemonic elite is separated from the means of culture, including the production of ideologies, that ideologies developed in capitalist society may often be discomforting to the hegemonic elite . . . ' (Gouldner, 1976: 232).

The view of the media as the capitalist class's 'conscious propagandists' is thus tempered by the recognition that the media is a 'highly contested territory'. These two perspectives, regarding the media, parallel a recent debate concerning the capitalist state that can provide useful insights into the rôle of the media. In recent years the concept of 'relative autonomy'—a useful shorthand to describe the capacity for limited independence on the part of an institution—was introduced in an attempt that challenged a more orthodox Marxist view of the state as the 'managing committee' or 'instrument' of the capitalist class (Block, 1977a, 1980; Esping-Anderson, Friedland and Wright, 1976; Wolfe, 1974; Zeitlin, 1980).

In this view, the actions of 'state managers' (political officials and bureaucrats) are somewhat independent of the capitalist class as a self-conscious entity. The *structural* dependence of the state on the capitalist class's control over investment—as well as the social backgrounds or political outlooks of the personnel filling the state managers' positions, or the direct campaign contributions and lobbying activities of capitalists and their agents—limits the autonomy of the state from acting too far against the interests of the capitalist class. A declining rate of economic activity would make it more difficult for state managers to raise revenue for the budget as well as cause unemployment, tax revolt and political discontent directed against state managers. Thus, state managers have a strong interest in maintaining 'business confidence', regardless of their own personal political or economic predilections. At the same time, however, state managers also face pressures and expectations from subordinate groups of citizens. To ignore such pressures and expectations would be to threaten the legitimacy of the state and the confidence of citizens (Bell, 1976). In their own self-interest, to avoid being cast out of office, state managers must 'give in' to social reforms against the desires and short-term self-interest of the capitalist class or fractions (regions, industries, corporations) within it. At various times, and on various policies, the state (or particular agencies of the state) enacts various taxation or regulatory reforms, for example, that represent challenges to capitalist property rights. 'The consequence is that many of the state actions that have served to strengthen capitalism have

been opposed by large sections of the capitalist class because they are seen as threats to class privilege and as steps towards the Leviathan state' (Block, 1980: 232).

Parallels may be seen in the relationship between capital and the media. Little attention has been paid, however, to the degree or specific mechanisms of autonomy exercised by the mass media within the context of capitalist class power. Indeed, Murdock and Golding (1979: 14) have noted the 'extraordinary underdevelopment of thought on the rôle of mass communications in reproducing class relations'. Likewise, Freiberg (1981: 5) observes that '(t)he media's degree of autonomy from these two spheres of power (the dominant industrial and financial enterprises and the state) is an empirical question and clearly must vary in either a comparative or historical framework'.

This paper is addressed to filling that gap by examining a period in recent history (the 1970s) when the mass media have exercised considerable autonomy, followed by an instance where the business community aggressively mobilized to limit that independence.

### Media organization and routines

Interest in the capitalist state's 'relative autonomy' was occasioned by those periods of American history—particularly the Progressive era, the Depression, and the 1960s—when the government enacted a series of structural reforms that were (or seemed to be) opposed by the leaders of big business. (Block, 1980; Dreier, 1979). Likewise, the question of the mass media's 'relative autonomy' is occasioned by a period of media aggressiveness—beginning in the late 1960s and extending through the 1970s—during which the wrongdoings of the largest corporations and business in general became regular grist for the journalists' mill. Although not to be exaggerated, this period was certainly one characterized by an upsurge of 'muckraking' and 'investigative' reporting as well as more routine reports, focusing on the alleged abuses of big business—windfall oil company profits, nuclear power plants accidents, chemical waste disposal hazards, bribery of public officials, 'dumping' of unsafe Americans-made products overseas, death and injuries from unsafe cars and similar topics (Schudson, 1978).

Just as the more orthodox 'instrumental' view of the state offered no explanation for periods of governmental structural reforms, so too does the 'instrumental' view of the mass media as a 'tool' or 'conscious propagandists' for the capitalist class offer no explanation for such a period of media activism.

The 'instrumental' view of the state emphasizes the direct links between the capitalist class and state managers. These include campaign contributions by big business; the interchange of personnel between major corporations and corporate law firms and top policy-making political positions; the lobbying of political office holders by well financed business lobbyists and associations; and the advice offered government officials through various business policy groups, think tanks and foundations (Domhoff, 1979; Useem, 1980). As we noted above, however, the state has a logic of its own that is independent of such direct and instrumental linkages.

One can similarly point to evidence for an 'instrumental' view of the mass media that would focus on the direct linkages between the major corporations and the media organizations. Three private broadcast networks (NBC, CBS and ABC)

dominate the 'public' airwaves of TV and radio. The 25 largest newspaper chains control over half of all daily newspaper circulations. The major news magazines are part of media conglomerates as well (Bagdikian, 1979; Compaine, 1979). These media organizations depend primarily on advertising for revenue and the overwhelming amount of such advertising comes from the major corporations (Barnouw, 1978). Major banks own controlling shares of many major media organizations (Brosnan, 1978). As media conglomerates join the ranks of giant corporations, they require capital to expand and need well connected executives to run interference with government agencies. Thus, through interlocking directorates, media corporations are tied to the nation's largest banks, corporations, law firms, think tanks and foundations, universities, philanthropies and business policy planning groups (Dreier and Weinberg, 1979). Media corporations also own real estate, sell their product overseas, employ workers and bargain with unions. Thus, besides their common concern for profits, media executives share with other business executives a fear of government regulation (especially recent efforts to break up cross-ownership of print and broadcast media) and a desire for a healthy 'business climate'. Indeed, media groups and trade associations (such as the American Newspaper Publishers Association) lobby in Washington like other industries and, when necessary, with other industries (Brown *et al.*, 1979). It is such evidence that leads many observers to view the mass media as a 'tool' or 'instrument' of the capitalist class.

But such evidence cannot explain why, how and under what conditions the media impinge on the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class. Like the capitalist state, the mass media institutions have an organizational logic of their own. It is the *structural* context of the mass media which both provides it with its degree of autonomy and also sets limits to that autonomy. It is thus necessary to know something about how the news media operate, how 'news' is defined and gathered, to understand the pushes and pulls on the media personnel (the parallel to the 'state managers').

### *Revenue and space*

Just as the capitalist state depends on a healthy business climate to raise revenue (and thus limits state manager's ability to act) so too do the mass media depend on advertisers from almost all of their revenue (and thus limits journalists' ability to act). Indeed, their primary function is not to provide news and entertainment, but to package and deliver audiences to advertisers, however seriously journalists take their rôles (Barnouw, 1978). Thus, media executives and owners are concerned about the health of the local and national economy in order to ensure a steady supply of advertising.

But journalists themselves are not particularly concerned with such long-term macro-economic issues. While they are aware that advertisers keep their employing organizations above, this awareness is not a major constraint in their day-to-day pursuit of the news (Epstein, 1973; Gans, 1979). Nor is there much direct interference by advertisers in the day-to-day operations of the newsrooms. Advertising *does*, however, impinge on journalists' daily activities in a more indirect way. The most crucial organizational constraint is that the mass media do not provide much room or time for 'news' at all. Three-quarters of most daily newspapers consists of ads, and much of the other one-quarter of the paper consists of comics, sports, advice columns, fashion, food and similar 'puffery'. TV news confronts even more

restrictive limitations. The news must be summarized in ten-, thirty- or sixty-second stories, emphasizing the visual aspects of news. Thus, for the commercial media to remain healthy as economic enterprises, they must limit the space and time devoted to 'news'.

### *Staff and sources*

Competing for limited space and time, journalists look for 'big', 'dramatic', 'catchy' stories that can be told simply. Also, because most print and broadcast journalists face daily deadlines (necessitated by economic, not journalistic, considerations), they rarely venture off the beaten track to look for 'newsworthy' events and issues. This, too, is a matter of the media's economic and organizational priorities. With limited staff, the media stations reporters at 'beats' where they expect 'news' to happen. This, of course, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and reporters under time and competitive pressures file stories from these beats rather than venture off the beaten track. In addition, as a result of these day-to-day routines, reporters develop on-going relationships with regular news sources. They often develop forms of mutual co-operation; the reporter wants a story and the source wants his version of reality reported. Gans has observed that 'events that strain the system of mutual obligations are rare' (Gans, 1967: 324).

Other things being equal, most daily news stories originate from *routine* channels—press releases, official proceedings (Congressional hearings, courtrooms, regulatory agencies), reports and staged media events such as press conferences and demonstrations. Because high-level government, corporate and foundation officials have greater resources to reach these channels, they are able to initiate and dominate the flow of what becomes 'newsworthy', as several studies have found (Epstein, 1973; Gans, 1979; Palentz, Reichart and McIntyre, 1971; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1972, 1978).

These powerful organizations have the resources not only to stage events and hire public relations staffs, but also to fund and publish reports and studies by 'experts' who can become 'reliable sources'. In contrast, the poor, the powerless and the unorganized lack the resources to command such routine access to reporters and the media. To make news, they must disrupt 'business as usual' (Gitlin, 1980; Goldenberg, 1975; Molotch and Lester, 1974). Labor relations become news only when strikes become violent. Ghetto conditions become news only when the poor riot. Nuclear power becomes an issue when demonstrators 'occupy' a nuclear construction site. Otherwise, under time and competitive pressures, reporters rarely go to union halls, ghettos and offices of social movement organizations. Even when they do, such 'controversies' are usually well orchestrated between those who are considered 'reliable' sources: Democrats *vs.* Republicans, Keynesians and monetarists, one 'expert' to rebut another 'expert'. The range of sources is narrowly defined by which groups and ideas are considered reliable and responsible (Tuchman, 1978).

Problems of access to other sources provide another structural (or legal) barrier. Politicians' dealings and connections, and the activities of government agencies, can be pried open with the Freedom of Information Act, public documents and frustrated employees who 'blow the whistle'. Thus, most exposés focus on the public sector—primarily public officials' 'conflicts of interests' and primarily with local entrepreneurs, real estate, construction firms and so on—not major corporations. Unless government regulatory agencies have done the work



already—they are frequently the source for ‘investigative’ reporting—documents and facts are hard to come by. Thus the legal barriers created by capitalist legal institutions to information regarding corporate behaviour make such sources of ‘news’ difficult to obtain.

Thus, reform-minded journalists are limited in much the same way that reform-minded ‘state managers’ are limited. Government agencies often do not provide the staff necessary to do the job they were allegedly created to do. For example, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration’s staff can investigate only a tiny fraction of all workplaces for health and safety conditions. Government agencies are also limited by jurisdictional boundaries that do not allow them to tread on the ‘turf’ of another agency. Or, like journalists are ‘captives’ of the pattern of mutual obligations between themselves and sources, government agencies are ‘captive’ of the very industries they are supposed to regulate (McConnell, 1966). For example, the Department of Energy relies on the oil industry for much of its information regarding oil reserves.

### *Ideology and worldview*

Constraints of revenue and space, and staff and sources, however, cannot completely explain the output of the major news media organizations. Other media organizations (e.g. *Mother Jones*, *The Village Voice*, *The Nation*) manage, in a more systematic way, but with fewer resources and even less space, consistently to break open stories and issues that the major media ignore or downplay. Indeed, the mainstream media often report such events and activities (such as the unsafe Ford Pinto story) only *after* the smaller media have reported them first. Mark Dowie, who investigated and wrote the Pinto story for *Mother Jones*, explained (personal interview) that it was there for anyone to dig out, but nobody else seemed to be thinking along these lines. ‘Stories like this are very much like photography. It’s not enough to know how to use a camera. You have to know what you’re looking for.’

Dowie’s comment suggests that journalists for mainstream media are constrained by a set of assumptions—an ideology or worldview—that limits their ability to ‘see’ or to pursue certain kinds of stories or issues. Sociologists have concurred with Dowie after examining the unspoken assumptions that underlie mainstream definitions of ‘news’.

The unspoken worldview, which journalists tend to share with other individuals of their class and educational background, has been labelled ‘responsible capitalism’ by Gans (1979: 46–48). In this worldview, business executives are expected to be honest and efficient. Economic growth and technological innovation are assumed to benefit the general public, with minor inconveniences that can be dealt with as they arise. Capitalism, it is assumed, generates prosperity for most and businesses are expected to ‘refrain from unreasonable profits and gross exploitation of workers and consumers’. Bigness—in business, government or unions—is generally considered a problem, but there is little explicit or implicit criticism of the oligopolistic nature of the American economy—perhaps because it is considered unavoidable or inevitable. Foreign policy is generally well-intentioned, although often bungled. Government is expected to serve as a ‘watchdog’ of business and to protect citizens from the worst abuses. Government has a responsibility to help the poor, the handicapped and others that cannot help them-

selves, but must be careful to avoid the dangers of bureaucracy (such as the 'welfare mess') and to avoid inhibiting economic growth and efficiency. Certain words illustrate this world view. Poor people get 'welfare', corporations get 'subsidies'. Unions make 'demands', business makes 'offers'.

In addition to this unspoken worldview of 'responsible capitalism', journalists also operate according to a professional *ideology* that is part of their professional socialization. They learn it in journalism school and on the job (Breed, 1955; Epstein, 1973; Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman, 1976; Schudson 1978; Tuchman, 1972, 1978). This is the ideology of 'objectivity'. Journalists learn and believe that the news media should be 'objective'. This does not mean that they equate 'news' with 'truth'. What it does mean is that journalists should strive to provide a balance of 'truth claims' (Tuchman, 1972) from different 'reliable' points of view. Although this ideology and 'strategic ritual' of objectivity (Tuchman, 1972) are part of professional socialization, not all reporters equally internalize these professional norms (Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman, 1976). But journalists are judged by their peers and superiors by these expectations and standards and thus, even among those journalists who do not accept the ideology of objectivity, there are strong pressures and sanctions to conform (Breed, 1955; Gans, 1979).

On a day-to-day basis, in other words, journalists have considerable freedom and autonomy to identify, gather and edit the news. But they must operate within certain organizational limits and routines, guided by the professional norms of 'objectivity', that impose restrictions on their freedom, whatever their personal beliefs and values. Since most share the values of 'responsible capitalism', however, some of their limits are self imposed.

The evidence of 'instrumental' links between big business and the media organizations (e.g. interlocking directorates, advertising) set the *outer limits* of news coverage, but they do not explain the media's day to day news activities and the immediate constraints on journalists involved in the social construction of 'news'.

### Bringing the 'bad news'

These arrangements and routines help to explain the low probability of the news media to expose corporate wrongdoing. But it does not explain why such reporting noticeably increased during the late 1960s and the 1970s.

There are two possible explanations for this occurrence. The first is that the actual number of incidents of corporate wrongdoing increased during this period. The second kind is that while the actual number may not have increased, the news media was more aggressive at seeking out such incidents and events; that is, that the news media reinterpreted what previously defined as unnewsworthy as suddenly (or gradually) newsworthy.

There is, obviously, no way to adequately assess the first explanation. We do not have any independent check on reality. Reality is, itself, a social construction, as many sociologists have suggested (Berger and Luckman, 1967). Even what we may consider objective 'facts'—the rate of inflation, the level of unemployment, the number of nuclear power plant accidents, the crime rate, the incidence of occupationally related injuries—are also statistical creations of institutions that have their own agendas and reasons for manufacturing facts (Cicourel, 1968; Fishman, 1978).



News, as many sociologists have observed, is also 'manufactured'. As we noted earlier, the news media as institutions have their own organizational dynamics and logic which render certain kinds of events 'newsworthy'. During the late 1960s and 1970s, news media organizations followed an organizational logic that led to an increase in reporting of corporate power and its abuses. But the reasons for this change are found not only in the operations of the news media itself, but also in social events and trends in the news media's environment. Three interrelated trends account for the upsurge of this kind of reporting during that period.

The first had to do with the explosion of social protest among various groups during this period. Movements and protests among blacks, students, anti-war dissidents, women, consumers, young workers and other groups created 'newsworthy' events and sources. By disrupting 'business as usual', they came within the line of vision of journalists and editors (Dreier, 1978; Epstein, 1978; Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Goldenberg, 1975; Molotch and Lester, 1974; Morris, 1973, 1975). Social movement events and leaders became increasingly interesting to editors and reporters, who believed that news coverage of these movements would appeal to readers and viewers, sell newspapers and magazines and increase ratings. Also, in a competitive media environment, it would be difficult to ignore such events and trends. Most Americans who view the evening news also read a daily newspaper and/or news magazine. Editors and journalists were aware of the competition between media organizations for coverage. To overlook such potential news would, they believed, hurt the credibility of their particular news organization; their audience, it was believed, might question the adequacy of news organizations. News of protests, attitude changes, leaders and other 'movement' stories filled the daily news hole and helped TV, radio stations, newspapers and news magazines sell attentive audiences to advertisers. The media's own commercial logic, in other words, created the impetus for coverage of 'anti-establishment' sources and activities.

The coverage was hardly even-handed. Most of the news coverage focused on the protest events and movements themselves. That is, they focused primarily on the protests rather than the *objects* of protest—corporate behaviour, government policy and so on. The movements themselves were the 'media events'. As a result, to capture the media's attention, the movements had to escalate their unusual or bizarre activities—to become a spectacle. This spiral of movement activity to attract the media also led, to some degree, to the discrediting of the movements themselves for 'outrageous' behaviour and 'extreme' viewpoints (Gitlin, 1980).

Nevertheless, in the course of covering the movements, it was unavoidable to also deal with the objects of protest. Ralph Nader, in a series of well documented reports, exposed wrongdoings by corporations. The anti-war movement focused attention on the activities of multinational corporations and the defense industry. Ghetto and community protests focused media attention on slum landlords, redlining by banks,<sup>1</sup> and lax government enforcement of housing codes. The women's movement focused attention on sexual discrimination by employers and sexist stereotyping in corporate advertising. Wildcat strikes by young workers (such as at Lordstown, Ohio in 1971) focused attention on dehumanizing working conditions and growing alienation and frustration among employees. Consumer boycotts coordinated by the farmworkers union or textile workers union focused

attention on the working and living conditions of migrant farmworkers and textile workers and the corporate policies of agri-business and textile industries. 'Occupations' of nuclear power plants by anti-nuclear protesters focused attention on the potential safety hazards of atomic energy plants.

Similarly, technological accidents (Molotch and Lester, 1974) that reveal business's lack of concern for worker or consumer safety, especially when they are accompanied by protest—Three Mile Island, Union Oil's oil spill off the Santa Barbara coast, Hooker Chemical's Love Canal waste disposal, for example—are grist for the journalists' mill. Questionable business practices may be hard to uncover, but corporations that break the law—J. P. Stevens's labor law violations, businesses that violate trade embargoes, companies that knowingly manufacture and sell unsafe products (e.g. Nestlé's milk formula, Ford's Pinto) and industries that violate anti-trust codes—found themselves subject to journalistic scrutiny *only* after they were brought to the media's attention by a social movement.

Journalists tend to interpret such violations of 'responsible capitalism' as isolated and random occurrences, rather than as enduring and systemic problems. By doing so, however, they help to create new 'issues', especially when there is a movement available to interpret these incidents and provide 'experts' to explain them in the larger context. It was no accident that one of the most hard-hitting documentaries, 'The Selling of the Pentagon', was aired in 1971 at the peak of the anti-war movement.

The *second* trend was that these protest activities led to a variety of actions on the part of local, state and federal government agencies—as well as the concern of elected officials—that gave movement-induced issues credibility. After the ghetto riots of the mid 1960s, for example, President Johnson called for investigations of the underlying causes of urban violence and discontent. The resulting studies, such as the Kerner Report (1968), focused attention on economic and social conditions and 'white racism'. The activities of Nader and the consumer/environmental movement brought forth reports and regulations by government agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission, Justice Department, or Environmental Protection Agency investigating consumer fraud, anti-trust violations, air and water pollution, harmful chemicals and additives in food and similar problems. The rise of worker unrest, the growing incidence of alcoholism, absenteeism, wildcat strikes and declining productivity, led the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to sponsor and issue a report, *Work in America*, which inspired similar studies and documented the problem of widespread worker alienation. The various social movements of the period used existing government agencies, or fought for the establishment of new ones, to investigate and regulate big business—labor through OSHA, environmentalists through EPA, feminists through EEOC and so on.

In addition, various reform movements fought for, and won, legislation which opened up information about both corporate and government practices. Common Cause, for example, won passage of laws requiring disclosure of campaign financing, enabling reform movements and journalists to link wealthy individuals and corporations to elected officials and their voting patterns. The neighborhood movement won passage of the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act requiring banks to disclose lending patterns—and thus expose 'redlining' practices. The Freedom of Information Act was extremely useful in gaining access to information about FBI infiltration of movement groups, government reports about exposure to nuclear radiation and many other 'muckraking' stories.

Finally, within government agencies there were various reform-minded individuals who did not necessarily share the viewpoints of their politically appointed agency or department heads. These individuals became 'whistle-blowers', typically anonymous employees who 'leaked' reports and other information that linked corporate power and government practice either directly to sympathetic reporters or indirectly through movement groups. For example, a middle-level employee of the Federal Power Commission leaked a report written by the agency that showed that the lifting of price controls would not result in more energy. The head of the agency (who was closely tied to the energy industry prior to his political appointment) had wanted to keep the report under wraps. After the 'leak', however, it became a major news item in papers across the country.

The impact of these practices—government reports on social problems, 'open the books' legislation and 'whistle-blowing' by employees—is to give greater legitimacy to the grievances and issues of protest movements. No longer are their complaints simply those of well-intentioned or aggrieved citizens. They now have the 'stamp of approval' of government agencies. When government agencies begin to investigate these matters, and when they later issue reports, these become 'newsworthy' and keep the issue (and the institutions under investigation) in the public eye. Elected officials jump on the bandwagon, taking sides, further fuelling and legitimating the controversy. These agencies, departments and officials became 'reliable sources' who can be quoted by reporters seeking 'truth claims'. These practices resulted in a steady stream of news stories and media investigations ('muckraking' or 'investigative' journalism) on corporate wrongdoing (Robinson, 1975).

*Third*, and finally, we should look at the personnel within the news media itself (Dreier, 1978; Schudson, 1978). After World War Two, journalism sought to 'professionalize'. Larger, more prestigious newspapers (and later broadcast media) began to require college degrees, including the increasingly acceptable journalism school credentials. Journalists in the 1960s and since were more likely to be college-educated with at least a smattering of social science emphasis instead of an emphasis on English or philosophy; more and more came to journalism from law school or from a variety of social science graduate programs. Journalism schools began to emphasize 'interpretive' reporting—analysis and background. This tempered some of the parochialism and anti-intellectualism within journalism. Their view of the world was shaped by formal study as well as by the city editor's outlook.

This cohort of journalists came of age, like their peers, during the 1960s period of growing social protest. Surveys found that younger journalists were more likely to identify with a cluster of values that Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman (1976) label 'participatory' journalism. These values emphasize the rôle of the journalist in shaping and even creating news, the importance of providing background, context and interpretation of news, and the newspaper's function as a moulder of opinion. These values were found, in particular, among journalists on the larger, more prestigious newspapers and magazines—in other words, those news media read by the nation's opinion leaders. Many of these journalists sympathized with the concerns of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s; indeed, journalists themselves began to protest the lack of 'newsroom democracy' within their own profession (Dreier, 1978). Although constrained by the organizational routines of daily or weekly journalism, they did seek to develop sources among social

movement activists and government employees who could provide 'reliable' information critical of business and state practices. In the context of the two conditions discussed above (social protest and government practices), news reporting that included criticisms and exposés of powerful institutions increased.

In combination, these conditions and circumstances led media institutions to 'manufacture' increasing numbers of reports which exposed or criticized corporate behavior. It was these news stories that so enraged corporate officials, particularly during the mid- and late-1970s.

### The corporate ideology

During this period, public opinion polls began to report a dramatic decline in public confidence of big business. Many observers noted that the US was going through a 'crisis of legitimacy' (Bell, 1976; Wolfe, 1978). A variety of trends and events—the Viet Nam war and the anti-war movement, the 'energy crisis' and inflation, Watergate and its spillover effects, the ghetto riots, the consumer movement, the rising rate of family break-up, the women's movement and changing sex rôles and so on—led to an overall decline in confidence in major institutions, including business. For example, whereas in 1966 a majority of Americans expressed high confidence in five out of twelve leadership groups, by 1977 not one of the twelve groups attracted the confidence of a majority of Americans (Harris, 1977, 1978).

Business leaders worried through the 1970s that in this hostile climate, elected officials would translate the public's declining confidence in business into anti-business legislation. They viewed the recent political reforms promoted by progressive groups—embodied in the activities of such agencies as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Equal Employment Opportunity Council, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Federal Trade Commission (all but the latter products of the late 1960s or 1970s)—as dangerous obstacles to corporate profits and a healthy economy.

America's business elite genuinely felt unfairly maligned and misunderstood. They were firmly convinced that the public's disapproval of their performance was based almost entirely on misunderstanding. If those responsible for shaping public opinion (particularly the news media, the universities and others in the cultural and intellectual institutions) were accurately informed about the benefits of the capitalist economic system, business's standing in the polls and among legislators would improve.

In speech after speech before groups of corporate leaders, in articles for both business and popular periodicals and in conferences where they discussed such matters informally, business leaders sounded a familiar and consistent theme: The news media dislike, and don't understand, business. They claimed that news coverage of business and the economy was simplistic and biased. They accused reporters and editors of being 'economically illiterate,' of sensationalizing stories to attract and frighten readers and views, and of wanting to 'put business out of business.'

This is not, however, simply the hostility of corporate leaders who have been 'burned' by individual stories. Their view of the media forms part of a coherent ideology, one which allows them to make sense of the world and their part in it. As Gertz (1964: 63) has suggested, 'the function of ideology is to make an

autonomous politics possible by providing the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped'.

Silk and Vogel (1976) observed a series of informal meetings, sponsored by the Conference Board, at which executives of major American corporations discussed the problems facing big business. They found that

The business community feels extremely hostile these days toward the press and the electronic media, which is blamed for the low public esteem of business. No one theme was so consistently mentioned at every conference, and few themes enjoyed such unanimous support (Silk and Vogel, 1976: 109).

These corporate executives believe that the media wield great and excessive power, but that it uses its power to 'defame those in authority, promote dissension and political division' and to 'use the poor performance of a few to castigate the entire business community'.

These executives of the largest corporations believe that the contributions of business get distorted in the news media. Typical comments include: 'Even though the press is a business, it doesn't reflect business values'. 'The media are destructive and misinformed.' 'Unless the press stops tearing down our system and begins to tell the public how it works, business leaders will not be permitted any future participation in the formation of social goals.'

Such comments and perceptions are not restricted to informal meetings of big businessmen. Articles in business periodicals and speeches before public gatherings of business executives increasing dramatically in the mid- and late 1970s reflect the same sentiments.

For example, Louis Banks, former editor of *Fortune* magazine, published an article in the *Harvard Business Review* entitled, 'Taking on the hostile media', in which he analysed the 'contemporary antagonism between business and the media'. He argued that the news media 'Interprets corporate affairs with a negative bias' (Banks, 1978a: 124). In the *Atlantic*, Banks observed that corporate executives frequently complain of 'media oversimplification, exaggerated fault-finding and antagonistic news selection' (Banks, 1978b: 42). In its 30 August 1976 issue, *Business Week* (the leading organ of the corporate worldview) expressed its concern that the *New York Times* (often considered the leading organ of 'corporate liberalism') had 'slid precipitously to the left and has become stridently anti-business in tone, ignoring the fact that the *Times* itself is a business—and one with very serious problems'.

The vice-president of a large utility company explained his concern about the media as follows:

We have people who are reporting on business who do not understand business or economics, or some other basic principles they need to know. They have more a social philosophy than an understanding of business (Reuss *et al.*, 1979: 7).

John Swearingen (1980), Chairman of Standard Oil Company told an assembly of energy corporation executives in 1980 that there is an 'incessant flood of misinformation being fed to the American people through our national information centers'. He later added:

That there is a distinct anti-business slant in television news is beyond argument. When business is mentioned at all, it is mentioned in terms of so-called hazardous chemical spills, pollution, unsafe equipment, unsafe working conditions, price gouging, bribery—every secular sin, in short, known to man.



Toward the end, he delivered an impassioned plea:

We must also do everything possible to persuade our politicians and journalists to ignore the uninformed emotionalism of the Hollywood-based anti-nuclear lobby.

These typical statements emanate from the leaders of the largest banks, corporations and corporate-sponsored organizations—in short, the so called ‘inner group’ with an alleged high level of class consciousness and a high level of political capacity (Useem, 1978, 1980). They are not simply complaints by the small business, competitive sector capitalists who, due to their position, could be expected to feel overwhelmed by political and economic forces outside their control. They believe, as evidenced by both public and private statements, that the news media are, in fact, *outside their control* and, in fact, ‘anti-business’. How is this corporate ideology to be explained?

It is useful to return to the parallels between the media and the state in terms of its relationship with the capitalist class. These complaints have a familiar ring. In many ways, they are echoes of the complaints of capitalists regarding the rôle of government. Indeed, as Vogel (1978: 45) has observed:

(T)he most characteristic, distinctive and persistent belief of American corporate executives is an underlying suspicion and mistrust of government. It distinguishes the American business community not only from every other bourgeoisie, but also from every other legitimate organization of political interests in American society.

The American capitalist class is uniquely obsessed with short-term profits and growth. Any infringements on its property rights are viewed with what, to their European counterparts, might be viewed as excessive alarm. This alarm contradicts a view of corporate ideology, popularized in the 1960s, that attributed to the ‘inner group’ within the capitalist class a high level of ‘class consciousness’ and a sophisticated concern with the long-term needs of the capitalist system (Block, 1977a, b, 1980; Vogel, 1978). In fact, as Vogel notes, hostility to government, the fear of encroaching restrictions on property rights, is characteristic not only of the business community in general, but also of the powerful executives of the largest corporate giants. And while some may argue that the corporate executive’s denunciations of government is mere clever political posturing to gain sympathy and to avoid public distrust of business–government collusion (McConnell, 1966; Moore, 1962), Silk and Vogel (1976) observe that, if anything, the private views of high-level corporate executives are even *more* critical of government than their public pronouncements. Thus, even though the state serves the interests of the capitalist class as a whole, individual members of that class, including the ‘inner group’, do not recognize this service. The fact that state actions that have served to strengthen capitalism-as-a-whole have been opposed by large sections of the capitalist class, and that the capitalist class in general harbors deep mistrust of the state, suggests that its class consciousness is not as sophisticated or developed as many have argued.

This same ideology that engenders hostility toward the state applies to the capitalist class’s mistrust of the mass media. Because the media institutions are not simply passive transmission belts of capitalist class propaganda, but instead have a degree of autonomy from both the capitalist class and the state, it allows a limited degree of both news and entertainment content that can, overtly and covertly,



challenge *specific* corporate practices, corporations or industries and *specific* government policies, agencies and officials. This limited independence, however, looms large in the corporate elite's consciousness. Criticism of specific practices and institutions are viewed as dangerous, creating hostility that can undermine the public's faith in the profit system as a whole and lead toward infringements on capitalists' freedom. The belief in 'freedom of the press' or the 'marketplace of ideas' as elements of capitalist democracy takes a back seat to fears regarding capitalists' own freedom. As a result, the corporate elite tend to view the media, like they do the state, with distrust and suspicion.

### The business mobilization

Obviously the news media are not responsible for inflation, unemployment, nuclear plant accidents, oil spills, pollution, unsafe workplaces or hazardous consumer products. But given their political consciousness and ideology, the business elite could not be expected to blame their own behavior, or 'the system' itself, for the growing crisis of confidence and legitimacy. Rather, it blamed the messenger—the nation's news media—attacking it for its 'emotional', 'sensational' and 'economically illiterate' reporting.

In the climate of increasing polarization, during the mid-1970s, the capitalist class members most concerned about the crisis of legitimacy (and the threat of government regulation) began to formulate a strategy to deal with the news media's 'anti-business' reporting. Not surprisingly, the strategy was initially promoted by those sectors most affected by the threat of public disapproval—the energy and chemical companies, the public utilities and the defence industry. Soon, however, the business mobilization spread to a broader range of corporate institutions. It developed into a class-wide mobilization.<sup>2</sup> Perceiving a crisis, the capitalist class sought to mend its internal divisions and promote a coherent and somewhat 'class-conscious', political strategy. Its purpose was to restore public confidence in the nation's leaders, and particularly in business as an institution, and to therefore stem the tide of 'anti-business' government policies. Corporate leaders saw an intimate link between public opinion and government action.

Corporate leaders began an ideological mobilization aimed at both the general public and at specific groups of opinion-leaders, particularly journalists. *Business Week* (Carson-Parker, 1974) sounded the battle cry in a 1974 article:

It will be a hard pill for many Americans to swallow—the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more. Nothing that this nation, or any other nation, has done in modern economic history compares in difficulty with the selling job that must now be done to make people accept this new reality.

This 'selling job' developed into a five-pronged campaign to reach both the broader public and more specific opinion leaders to stem the tide of 'anti-business' reporting by the news media. The five mechanisms developed over a period of several years included:

- (1) Establishing think tanks and publications which could function as 'sources' and 'experts' to the news media;
- (2) Establishing programs of 'business reporting' and 'economics journalism' at major universities to 'improve' coverage of business by the news media by reaching journalism students and working journalists;

(3) Establishing a large number of awards and prizes for reporting sponsored by corporations, industries and corporate-sponsored institutions to promote and reward more favorable reporting;

(4) Promoting '*détente*' between business and the media by organizing conferences, workshops and other events at which top corporate executives and media executives came together to discuss their common concerns; and

(5) Devising expensive 'advocacy advertising' campaigns to promote the perspective of big business directly in newspapers, magazines and television. It also increased its sponsorship of arts and culture programs, particularly on television.

Each part of this business mobilization will be described in brief.

First, business established a number of foundations, think tanks and publications to promote 'neo-conservative' pro-business ideas. These were viewed as conservative counterparts to the liberal foundations and think tanks, such as the Ford Foundation, Brookings Institutions and Carnegie Foundation, that had promoted many of the 'liberal' welfare state programs of the post-war period (Domhoff, 1979). These old and established foundations had become relatively independent from their corporate sponsors; indeed, Henry Ford resigned from the board of the Ford Foundation in protest of its 'anti-capitalist' policies.

The new 'neo-conservative' foundations included the American Enterprise Institute (which soon had a budget and staff the size of Brookings), the Business Roundtable, the Institute for Contemporary Studies, the International Institute for Economic Research, the Media Institute and The Ethics and Public Policy Center, all founded in the 1970s. Corporate money helped to revitalize established conservative institutes such as the Hoover Institution, the American Institute for Public Policy Research, the Heritage Foundation and the Hudson Institute, among others.

These think tanks and foundations housed conservative intellectuals, primarily social scientists (mostly economists), to do studies that proved the harmful effects of government regulation, corporate taxes and labor unions; the weakness of the United States defence posture; and the misguided or subversive motivations of consumer, labor and other advocates. These institutions developed publications (newsletters, reports, magazines) across the country. Their authors were (and are) promoted and made accessible for interviews and background briefings with journalists. For journalists—always hungry for 'informed sources' and new ideas with the stamp of scholarly legitimacy—these right-wing think tanks and intellectuals are a goldmine (Vogel, 1979). For example, *Newsweek* featured a story citing a report by the Media Institute, a corporate think tank, claiming that the portrayal of corporate executives on TV revealed an 'anti-business bias' (*Newsweek*, 27 April 1981: 51).

These institutions not only promoted conservative, pro-business studies and scholars, they also promoted a new social theory—the theory of the 'new class'—that was used to discredit liberal 'anti-business' intellectuals and journalists. According to the theory, it was this 'new class'—children of post-war affluent middle-class families—that formed the backbone of the New Left, consumer advocates, feminists, environmentalists and other 'anti-business' 'no growth' movements. They were also the faculty members and journalists responsible for anti-business teaching and reporting. The appeal of this theory for corporate executives

is that it fits neatly into existing ideologies that legitimate and rationalize corporate behavior and finds that the poor and the working class, as well as corporations, are antagonists of this liberal 'new class'. Promoters of this theory, such as Irving Kristol (editor of the neo-conservative *Public Interest* and columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*) and Herman Kahn were invited to speak before corporate audiences. Articles promoting the theory were published in business periodicals (e.g. Nickel, 1980). Corporate-sponsored foundations funded studies (e.g. B. Bruce Briggs, *The New Class?*) to promote these ideas.

Both the volume of conservative studies and books and the promotion of the 'new class' theory was meant to serve the two purposes noted above. On the one hand, to provide more cohesion and self-confidence among the ranks of the business community by solidifying its ideological armor against 'anti-business' attacks. On the other hand, to reach public opinion, through the mass media, with these ideas.

Second, to reach journalists and future journalists more directly, corporations and corporate-sponsored foundations established programs to 'improve' economics and business reporting, to make journalists more economically 'literate' (Anonymous, 1978a, 1979a, b, 1980a, b; Hill, 1977; Marquez, 1979). This corresponds to the businessmen's ideology that the media's critical reporting of business activity is due more to misreporting by 'ill-informed' journalists than actual corporate behavior, and thus neatly fits into the existing ideological context.

The Foundation for Economic Freedom, an arm of the National Association of Manufacturers, established a program to fund economic workshops at journalism schools, to sponsor a textbook on economic and business reporting, to sponsor workshops for editors on economic issues and to bring small groups of reporters to Washington for 'intensive briefings' with 'private sector leaders'. The program was co-sponsored by the American Newspaper Publishing Association and the Association for Education in Journalism. General Motors Corporation established a 'Business Understanding Program' which included sponsorship of studies by journalism students on the 'rôles and responsibilities of business and the news media' at 18 journalism schools. ITT launched a Key Issues Lecture Series at the University of Missouri School of Journalism focusing on business reporting. The lectures were later published as a book to be used in journalism classes (McPhatter, 1980). Corporate grants sponsored new programs on economics journalism at Columbia University, MIT, American University, University of Missouri, Carnegie-Mellon University, the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University, among others, all begun in the mid- or late-1970s. The Bagehot Fellowship in Economics and Business Journalism, part of the Columbia University School of Journalism, was initially funded by AT and T, Citibank, Alcoa, Exxon, General Electric, IBM, Prudential Life and Mobil. When the program's director later wrote a book critical of the oil industry, Mobil withdrew its funding (Anonymous, 1981).

The emphasis on all these programs—whether for college students or mid-career journalists—is to bring them together with business leaders and to promote more sympathy toward business.

The business community's third strategy was the creation of numerous awards and prizes for news reporting. It is critical to understand that journalism, as a profession, has few agreed-upon standards to evaluate performance (Bucher and Strauss, 1961; Dreier, 1978; Janowitz, 1975; Kimball, 1967). It is also a highly

individualistic and competitive profession. In this context, various prizes and awards are often used by editors (as well as reporters themselves) to judge performance. Newspapers, magazines and broadcast media pay special attention to the number of prestigious awards garnered by employees. They feature stories in their own pages on award-winners, often promote employees on the basis of such awards and so on.

Recognizing this, corporations, foundations, industries and business schools began to sponsor contests on various aspects of business or consumer reporting. These are not only symbolic; in 1980 various journalism contests (not *all* corporate-sponsored) totaled \$1.7 million in prize money (Anonymous, 1979a, 1980a).

The prestigious Loeb Awards (the 'Pulitzer Prize of financial journalism') are administered by the Graduate School of Management at UCLA. The Media Awards for Economic Understanding is administered by the Amos Tuck School of Business Administration at Dartmouth and supported by Champion International Corporation. (In 1979 it received 1400 entries from journalists.) DeKalb Ag Research confers an Oscar for agricultural reporting; its judges included former Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz and Donald Dilworth, former Deere farm machinery company executive. The University of Missouri Journalism School awards a prize for energy reporting that is subsidized by the National Gas Association. Westinghouse offers an award for science reporting, Carnation for nutrition reporting, The Atomic Industrial Forum for energy reporting and the National Association of Home Builders for housing reporting. The list of such awards fills 44 pages in the *Editor and Publisher* annual directory. Most, though not all, were started in the 1970s. The purposes of such awards is candidly observed by a headline in the newspaper industry's trade journal, *Editor and Publisher*: 'Contests help to improve business/finance writing'. The head of the Foreign Business Council observed that, 'I think we can say that the business journalism awards and fellowships are paying off' (Anonymous, 1979a).

The corporate-backed award helps subtly to shape the kinds of stories journalists pursue and the kinds of standards editors recognize. Most of the winning stories are not blatant propaganda for the business community or specific industries, but neither are they the kind of 'muckraking' or 'investigative' reports that corporate executives were so enraged about.

Fourth, corporations and corporate-sponsored foundations organized a variety of forums at which corporate executives and media executives could come together to discuss the media's alleged 'anti-business' bias. An early effort was a series of exclusive seminars, sponsored by the Ford Foundation in 1977, that brought together high-level corporate executives and lawyers (most of them from Fortune 500 corporations), executives of the major, elite media and a few reporters, to engage in frank 'off-the-record' discussion for two days (Hill, 1978; Simons and Califano, 1979). The corporate executives' message was that the media needed to become more sensitive to big business and to 'improve' its business coverage.

Similar seminars and workshops were organized for the same purpose. For example the College of Business Administration at Georgia State University held a symposium on 'Business and the Media' in 1977 that brought together business, news media, public relations and academic representatives. The symposium's articles were published as a book to be used in the growing number of business journalism programs (Aronoff, 1979).

Corporate executives and media executives increasingly were invited to speak to

each other's organizations on the general topic of '*détente*' between business and the media (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1976; Donahue, 1980; Foy, 1978; Gannon, 1979; Laventhal, 1979; Neuharth, 1979; Spafford, 1978).

Within a few years after the first '*détente*' meetings, newspapers across the country began to increase dramatically the size and staff of their business sections (Carmody, 1980; Marquez, 1979; Morris, 1981; Radolf, 1980). Every major newspaper in the nation has either started or increased its business section, hired more reporters and promoted the sections to entice new readers and advertisers. Although news executives justify this trend as a response to the public's demand for more in-depth news about the economy, the timing of the expanded business coverage appears more than coincidental. For the most part, the expanded coverage of business and economics is uncritical. Much of it is simply boosterism—glowing stories of new investment plans, fawning profiles of corporate executives, optimistic summaries of quarterly and annual corporate reports. Stories about personal finance—how to start a new business, where to invest your excess savings, problems of finding a second home—take up most of the remaining additional space. There is almost no investigative reporting and little good said about unions or consumer groups. Indeed, the pages are written for a very select audience—the 'upscale' (affluent) readers and business executives who are interested in business news and whom newspapers are cultivating to attract advertisers and increase their ad rates (Radolf, 1980).

Finally, and most visibly, major corporations devised an expensive campaign of advertising to promote more pro-business attitudes among both the general public and, more specific, at journalists and opinion leaders. This kind of promotion takes on several components.

The most obvious are the 'issue' or 'advocacy' advertising campaigns found on television, in general circulation magazines and in newspapers. These promote a company's or an industry's 'own point of view on controversial public policy issues that affect their business' (Dougherty, 1980; Paletz, Pearson and Willis, 1977; Sethi, 1977). Mobil Oil's ad campaign—on the op-ed pages of prestigious newspapers and on TV—is the most visible, but other campaigns followed Mobil's lead.

These ads are not designed to sell products but to 'persuade the public of the merits of a particular political perspective' (Vogel, 1979: 627). Corporations spent approximately \$100 million in 1975 and \$140 million in 1976 on advocacy advertising and this was expected to increase. More than 35 corporations and trade associations launched public-advocacy campaigns, although utility and energy companies (who faced the most hostility in public opinion) were the most active. According to one study, 'major corporate advertisers are now spending about one-third of their advertising dollars on campaigns aimed at the public in their roles as citizens rather than consumers' (Vogel, 1979: 627).

The Advertising Council (Hirsch, 1975)—a corporate-sponsored policy organization—sponsored an expensive ad campaign called 'The American Economic System . . . and your part in it' (using Peanuts cartoon characters), a free-market analysis of American capitalism, and promoted a booklet by the same name in ads on TV, radio, newspapers and magazines.

Corporations and trade associations also directed a campaign at opinion leaders, particularly journalists and intellectuals. Ads in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, for example, promote both specific industry's point-of-view and specific conservative causes, such as ads by the National Right to Work Committee that



depict powerful unions trampling on the individual rights of beleaguered individual workers. Corporations' public relations departments had stepped up ads in journalism periodicals encouraging reporters to call them with questions and for facts on industry-related matters.

Corporations also stepped up sponsorship of public television programs (MacDougall, 1981). In 1980, 115 corporations donated \$30 million to public TV—more than one-half by the four major oil companies (McLean, 1981). The most obvious is the series 'Free to Choose', in which conservative economist Milton Friedman promoted his pro-business views; a book by the same title, heavily promoted, became a nationwide best-seller. The Fertilizer Institute sponsored by a show 'And One to Grow On', in TV newscast format starring former TV newsman Martin Agronsky, to disassociate fertilizers in the public's mind from the unfavorable publicity that has tarnished pesticides. The Institute's sponsorship was omitted when it was aired on TV, paid for by the Institute. Other corporations and trade associations are producing radio and TV programs to answer critics or promote their perspective. In 1980, for example, 62 TV stations aired 'Energy at the Crossroads', one of 11 special reports on energy issues sponsored by Mobil since 1976 and sent free to TV stations. The US Chamber of Commerce sends a weekly panel discussion program, 'What's the Issue?', to 400 radio stations for free, and in 1980 began sponsoring 'It's Your Business' on public TV.

In the 1970s business began to supply pre-recorded interviews with business advocates to TV and radio stations, who use them as part of newscasts, usually without reference to their sources. Business began to flood small newspapers with ready-to-use canned editorials, columns and cartoons that carry subtle corporate messages. Corporations have hired 'experts' (distinguished from public relations people) to speak to the media directly. Mobil once sent 21 executives to 21 cities within a few days where they have appeared on more than 100 talk shows, news broadcasts and radio call-in programs. Shell Chemical Co. dispatched a toxicologist on a week-long tour to six TV stations, nine radio stations and two newspapers to argue that there is no occupational cancer epidemic and no need for more stringent federal standards to protect workers from carcinogens (MacDougall, 1981).

## Conclusion

The distrust and hostility between the business community and the news media may seem paradoxical to those used to viewing the media as a 'tool' of the capitalist class. But by documenting this hostility, and the capitalist class's intensive efforts to mobilize its resources to influence the media, we have cast doubt on any theory which views such media as direct and passive instruments. Rather, as we have sought to show, the relationship between the capitalist class and the mass media is more complex and subtle. Like the relationship between the capitalist class and the state, it is the subject to the push and pull of social, economic and political forces outside the control of any one group, strata, or class. The ability of the capitalist class to impose its ideological hegemony—both on itself and on subordinate groups—is limited by the indeterminateness of social forces, including those forces which provide the mass media with a degree of independence. During periods of crisis, or at least perceived crisis, the capitalist class has the capacity to unify and mobilize its resources to promote its common political goals. The recent mobilization directed toward the mass media indicates that capitalist rule is not



easy nor secure. So long as its ability to engineer the consent of the subordinate groups is problematic, so long as the 'ideological terrain' is 'contested territory' (Miliband; 1977: 54), the capitalist class always faces the threat of challenge from below.

## Notes

1. 'Redlining' is the practice by banks and other lending institutions to designate an area or neighbourhood a 'poor risk' and thus limit or withhold mortgages—leading to (or accelerating) its decline.
2. Ironically, perhaps, President Nixon articulated the need for a business mobilization in a 1974 interview with the *New York Times*. Nixon said that the trouble with the country was the weakness and division among 'the leaders of industry, the bankers, the newspapers. . . . The people as a whole can be led back to some kind of consensus if only the leaders can take hold of themselves' (Sulzberger, 1974).

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