

Brought to You By”, deals with how news is put together. The second paragraph of the introduction sets the frame. “If the old saying is true, ‘He who pays the piper calls the tune,’ we will have to find out who owns and controls the mass media in order to know what interests they might represent, and therefore, what point of view they are likely to reflect.” (p.115) The purpose of this frame is not to find out how the media works, but to organize people against the “ruling class”. Science, in the process, is abandoned.

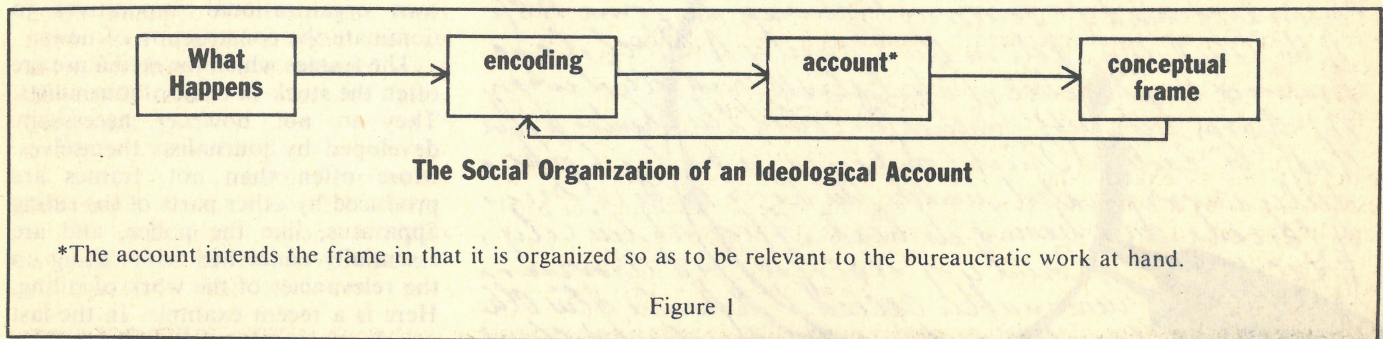
The point of view of the media, according to this account, reflects the owners’ interests. Ownership translates directly into control. At worst, this conjures up images of Lord Thompson of Fleet, for example,

production. But its owners can. Thus, the media through their owners get enough points to be included in the “ruling class”. What this interpretive frame, or set of procedures, requires is selecting out certain features of the media — ownership and control — abstracting them from the actual work of producing the news, and then using them to give an account of media content. On close inspection, the mediations in this account, as Marx would describe them, turn out to be “mystical connections”. Again, if we actually went and looked at how news is produced, it wouldn’t look like this.

The view of class and of ruling in BTLs is much more at home in the mid-nineteenth century than it is in the latter half of this century. It probably describes quite accurately William

have a point of view. It is constructed so as to look straight on, describing the world simply as it is. These practices are absolutely essential to establishing and maintaining the credibility, and thereby the power of the media as a feature of a ruling apparatus.

For example, in the aftermath of the Toronto bath raids, the reportage in the Toronto Sun was every bit as objective as the stories filed by reporters with the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail, even though the editorial views of the Sun had up to that time been incredibly homophobic. Reporters, no matter who they work for, know how to put together an objective account. For most of them to do otherwise would be unprofessional. Objectivity is thus the unique feature of modern reporting.



sitting all day with galley proofs for the many hundreds of newspapers he owns before him, blue pencil in hand, personally shaping the news. At best, we see him sitting at a super editor’s desk with a complete grasp of news events, dictating memoranda to local editors detailing the interpretive frames they are to use to report on the news as it breaks around the world. Now, while it is true that some owners of the media take some interest in how the news is shaped — Henry Luce of Time magazine is a good example — if we actually went and looked at how news is produced it would look quite different from this account.

What is class?

What has gone wrong? The problem, and remember that BTLs is a left-wing book, is how to develop a class analysis of the media. But what is class? BTLs treats class as a category with a check list. If a person, event, or thing can score enough points, it can be lumped into the category “ruling class”. What are the criteria on the list? Among others, “ownership of the means of production” figures prominently. So, how then is the media seen to be part of the ruling class? It can’t itself be said to own the means of

Lyon MacKenzie’s relation to the Upper Canada Colonial Advocate in the 1820s, the lack of a connection to the ruling class notwithstanding. What it fails to grasp is how in our society ruling is a feature of bureaucracy. What is important to keep in mind is that news is produced by mammoth news organizations with huge budgets, organized by professional newspaper men/women, and T.V. producers.

BTLs also fails to see, in this respect, that the fundamental feature of this form of ruling is its objective, rational character. The class character of the present ruling apparatus is not to be found in bias and propaganda, but like all bureaucracies, in its objectivity and rationality. This is true not only for the media, but for labour relations hearings, psychological testing in schools, and job promotion procedures within the public service, to name but a few of many thousands of similar practices.

If we went to the CBC news department or to the editorial offices of the Globe and Mail, we would be able to see the practices involved in objective reporting. We would also find that they were ubiquitous and thought to be the mark of good journalism. An objective report is first and foremost a factual one. It is not biased; nor does it

Its production is what nowadays separates editorial comment and the work of columnists from the news.

The objective frame

The production of objectivity, however, is an ideological practice. This is because it operates as an interpretive frame selecting out certain features of an event and ordering them so as to produce an objective account. In the process, the actual social organization of life is obscured. This can be done in a number of ways. Here are two examples of how the practices of objectivity first select and then order the features of a news event.

One way of producing objectivity is to generate the facts of a story out of information provided by other organizational components of the ruling apparatus. Thus, police reports, court records, government statistics, scholarly studies, and so forth are taken to be factual and thus objective. Of course, in reality this information itself is produced ideologically. Think of how a bureaucratic form or a survey questionnaire selects and organizes an account of a lived reality. What is crucial here is how the organizational imperatives of the police, the government, and, for example, academic