

Mindmoulding

Solidarity Federation

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Media might be moulding the minds of us masses, but how?

Media is a crucial means of societal information exchange. Information is money and power. Little wonder then, that media is so important to the power bases of capitalism. But what role does media play and how do they 'get away with it'?

We come into a society, with social relations already in place. In adjusting to it, while at the same time, being constantly bombarded with stimuli designed to 'socialise' us, we become largely what this environment makes us. That is to say, our development is influenced to fit society's values. This social conditioning to a large extent determines what we call "public opinion" and, as such, could be said to be the very basis of so-called democracy. To continue, it must be reinforced.

Capitalism requires that we are barred from managing our own affairs and that information is controlled by a specialised class. Meanwhile, an illusion of 'democracy' is portrayed. Our heritage, or culture, consisting of ideas, mores, customs, techniques and social habits passed down through the generations, gives rise to an ideology that perpetuates the very system it arose from.

ideology

Ideology is a belief system, organised around certain values, upon which a particular economic or social order rests. Its function is to represent the status quo as normal. It bolsters the class system, by indoctrinating repressed classes to accept their subordinate position. It projects what are in fact partisan, conservative and specifically capitalist values as true of all times and places, and thus natural, inevitable and unchangeable. Its whole social function can be summed up as a myth, fabricated and manipulated by rulers to dominate the ruled. It is a system of mass misrepresentation that is indispensable if people are to be formed, transformed and equipped to continue the conditions of their existence.

Ideology, therefore, shows how ideas are directly related to the material conditions of society, and how they are an active political force, rather than mere reflections of the world we live in.

Our social environment affects our behaviour, just as our physical environment does. Of course, there is socialisation in all societies. Much is acquired by imitation, persuasion and suggestion, but much is also acquired by conditioning, by the modification and control of behaviour through the social environment. From childhood to death, people are conditioned to believe that the present society is the only form possible, and superior to anything else.

legitimacy

Behavioural responses are built up through experience and outside conditioning. If certain ideas are consistently rewarded they are reinforced, acquiring new significance. Continued reinforcing reduces and eliminates other, random responses. However, should an abrupt or radical change result in previously reinforced responses being no longer appropriate, an increase in random responses follows in a search for what is now appropriate. This is part of the legitimisation process.

'Legitimacy' is notoriously difficult to define, especially in societies that claim to be democratic but function in an authoritarian manner. Fundamentally, it means acceptability by the people, but how is this achieved? In overtly authoritarian regimes, compliance is achieved through fear.

In liberal democracies, the methods are far more subtle and sophisticated. Compliance not only subjugates the individual but also ensures that those who control society remain in control. There is a sense of history that ensures conformity to society's values, which are never put forward for reasoned consideration, but are merely indoctrinated into, and internalised by, the individual.

This submission to authority very often occurs in spite of blatant contradictions, by-passing reasoned analysis. To question such implanted ideas and values requires some insight or observation to cause the individual to stop, observe, think and formulate judgements.

deviance

Whereas one person is totally conditioned and succumbs to the bombardment of values of the dominant ideology, another, having acquired some insight from knowledge or experience, may resist. On the whole, though, mores, customs, values and procedures are often so entrenched that those who do question them, in turn bring themselves into question as somehow abnormal and 'deviant'. However, it must also be borne in mind that capitalism, may deliberately foster 'ineffectual deviance' to divert rebellious energy into dead-ends.

The family, school, church, workplace, neighbourhood and, of course, the media, all contribute to this process. The most potent of these influences, the media and the education system are in the hands of the most powerful sections of society. The education system indoctrinates impressionable children in their expected roles, values, morality and perceptions. They are taught their place in the hierarchy ensuring a regimented workforce to produce profits for capitalism. Those who would keep society exactly as it is expect schools to preserve the status quo. This is the hidden curriculum. Independent thought and moral, political and creative imagination are actively discouraged. As a result, when these children become adults, their reasoning ability tends to be restricted by the parameters already set by the system.

Sometimes a person or group may emerge as a threat to social values and ruling class interests. When this happens, all the forces of the establishment are mustered in its defence. Those advocating change are vilified, and have their views distorted; there are reforms to modify demands and thereby regain the initiative without resorting to physical repression; those resisting change may be portrayed as 'right thinking' and maintaining a sense of social order and propriety.

The media, especially, manipulates information to deliver subliminal and misinforming directives in the guise of news. Language plays a very important role, for, in addition to objectifying reality and acting as the medium of all social communication, language is also the basis of conceptualisation. Now, if false, or emotionally coloured, meanings are given to certain terms, a distorted picture can be presented. In fact, through such use of language, persuasion, distortion, ostracism, gossip, and ridicule can become very powerful community based methods of social control.

The technology of TV is ideal for this. It has a captive passive audience who cannot interrupt, and who are 'willingly receptive'. Therefore, it can create 'norms' designed to legitimise the status quo. It is not only news programs that implant ideas and condition responses but 'entertainment' programs too, soaps especially. The stories may be fictional but the situations are perceived as reflecting everyday reality. This is, however, false. They merely stereotype, rather than reflect, life. Those who wield power in society are conscious of what a powerful tool for moulding and manipulating public opinion this is. The media's format of aggression and seduc-

tion is designed to mesmerise and captivate the largest possible audience while the state and capitalist corporations hide behind a web of dis-information, laws, censorship, and false explanations.

When we consider the nature of power in modern capitalist society, its ideology and its legitimisation, we can only conclude that people do not get the society they want, but rather the society they have been led to believe they want.

The ideas and beliefs which people have enable the system to persist. This being the case, it becomes imperative to understand the role played by ideology if we are ever to change society. Nevertheless, as human beings, we are rational animals with the ability to question and reason, to seek grounds for belief. It is this that has facilitated our progress. The real social revolution begins in the minds of the people, changing their values, beliefs, perspectives and the way in which they relate to one another. To merely change the structural organisation of society, would simply result in enabling the system to reproduce itself again under another name, creating the same relationships between people as before.

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