

## PROPAGANDA AND CONSCIOUSNESS

What follows is a slightly changed re-print of a document produced by one of the present editors to introduce a day-school on the newspaper in Liverpool, Spring '74. The central sections on general problems involved in propaganda and consciousness are unchanged photocopied versions of the original, despite the authors feeling that there are some weaknesses/mistakes. The first and last sections have been changed because they were specific to the time and existing problems. The arguments of the first section - 'The situation as it stands', have been summarised. The last section has been summarised with a retrospective set of comments on how many of the changes have been implemented, in the context of new developments in propaganda, like the bulletins.

### (A) THE SITUATION AS IT STANDS

The document began by pointing out that we all worked with a model image in our heads in terms of who the paper was aimed at. In practice this was 'the militant' - given that we knew the possibility of reaching the masses was illusory. Narrowed down that meant the militant worker rather than the militant women or youth. This being a product of our existing experience in practice and previous newspaper experience, and in terms of the composition of our primarily industrial readership of the time.

This image determined a lot of the content of the paper and its form, eg the difficulty of scaling a paper that was dominated by back-up articles to existing base work in shopping centres or colleges. But it was also clear that if we were a 'militants' paper, then we hadn't been a very good one - for 3 reasons. Firstly because of a confusion of aims and content eg. too much irrelevant system-bashing. "In some senses we are preaching to the converted in the illusion that we are agitating amongst the masses." Second we were not adequately preparing militants with the practical and ideological tools to fight the struggle, eg. articles about the motor industry that put the crisis in an international perspective/or articles dealing with popular socialist ideas/theory. Thirdly too much of the content of the paper came out of our own needs/heads - 'I fancy doing an article about X...' We were over critical and fussy about the content in reaction to how the readers would view the articles, as the document said:- "We seldom have our starting point in the direct experience and contradictions in the lives of our readership or the masses beyond them." This also went for other forms of propaganda eg. 'crisis broadsheets' constructed with impeccable logic - "why it arose, historical development etc" - but without a realisation that such a 'logic' is often abstract to how the mass of people view or are capable of viewing the situation.

### THE MEDIA AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The function of the bourgeois media is to generalise ruling class ideas and to permeate other sections of the population with their way of thinking. It is written and produced for the masses. Its aim is to mystify people about their situation and the possibilities of changing it, to keep people in a state of ignorance. This is achieved in a different way than usually thought:-

"The deepest consciously-unconsciously pursued aim of the capitalist press is not that of producing false convictions of the reader, by lies and distortions, although that is the charge made by communists. What the capitalist press seeks to do is shape the structure of the readers' consciousness in such a way that he will be perpetually unable to distinguish between true and false, to relate causes and effects, to place individual facts in their total context and to rationally integrate new knowledge into this perspective. When this has been achieved, the readers' brain can be moulded like soft wax.

(Fogarisi)

The abundance of news, information and knowledge presented to people is not merely ideologically biased, but jumbled, incoherent, trivialised, sensationalised and de-politicised.

The reader/viewers critical development of reading and writing ability is stunted and conditioned by the form & the content presentation. The popular press presents it in forms that are easily accessible to the worker, tired from the production line or the housewife from looking after the kids. Big headlines, bold type, stories with the political and social guts ripped out of them provide a staple diet that conditions the possibility of alternative revolutionary forms of propaganda. News papers are backed up by 'Trash novels', comics, romance mags., football bags, all offering similar form and content. They would not be acceptable to the w/c if they didn't fill a real social need, for escape and release and excitement in a dull and unrewarding world. Such material is often written by ex-w/c people who can mould it to meet their 'needs'. The fact that it then distorts and recuperates those needs to match those of capitalist production is not the point. We have to meet and transform them also, we cannot impose an alien reality and false needs on any potential readership.

The bourgeois media also attempts to stunt the critical faculties of the masses by minimising the feedback to newspaper, TV etc. It gives the image that the media is necessarily the place only for specialist journalists, editors, producers etc. Such 'feedback' that there is, e.g. (phone-ins, viewers shows) is carefully selected and controlled to ensure that they are only token. This is in spite of the fact, as Enzensburger points out that today's electronic media, for the first time in history makes possible mass access and two-way communication on radio, TV, tapes video, film, etc.

The picture presented of the relationship between media and class consciousness is however indialectical so far. There are other sides of the picture. While it is true that the media works on the basis of false imagery, rhetoric (promises that can't be fulfilled, empty statements) sensationalism and specialisation etc. it does not totally manipulate people. None of us can be reduced to soft wax. Any bourgeois propaganda is mediated through the world that people live and act in. It is filtered through pre-existing sets of ideas, prejudices, ways of organising etc. which may contradict its poisonous message. Millions of workers buy the Daily Express and vote Labour. Millions buy the Echo, read the football and ignore the rest - because it clashed with what they see and feel around them. This is even clearer in the age of TV and films. Because the media has become so visual it transmits images above and beyond the ideological bias of the commentary. Those images become a learning process in themselves. Consciously or unconsciously, workers can learn new tactics of sit-ins, students can see what their comrades are doing in other countries, the reality of imperialist wars confronts us in our living rooms, daily. These are the contradictions which destroy the possibility of Big Brother - all manipulative relationship between media and consciousness.

#### The left press

"In western Europe, the socialist movement mainly addresses itself to a public of converts through newspaper and journals which are exclusive in terms of language, content and form. These newspapers pre-suppose a structure of party members and sympathisers and a situation that roughly corresponds to the historical situation in 1900.. They are fixated on the 'Iskra' model" (Ensenburger)

40 years ago Reich was saying that the left press was tied to 'outmoded, ossified phrases, slogans, schemas, forms of discussion.' In general this

is still the case today. The propaganda of the left contrasts to the ruling class in content only. In terms of form and relationship to the masses it mirrors the bourgeois media, in important ways. It is generally written by specialists, even rank and file members of parties are seldom involved. Much of it is stuffed with incomprehensible and boring jargon. It is full of rhetoric, symbolism and mystifying imagery, constantly setting impossible goals and exhorting to ridiculous feats. Telling people to do crazy things that have no chance of coming off e.g. 'putting demands on the Labour Party' so that the reformism will be exposed in the eyes of the manipulated.

Of course the rhetoric is radical and the imagery militant, but it has similar effects on the masses (if it reaches them!). In fact it seldom does, left wing papers seldom reach beyond militants. As such they are rooted in the history and culture of the 'labour movement' and the Trade unions. Most left wing papers are for industrial workers, unlike us, they are not aware that this is a limitation. Their scope is narrow, their language restricted to those familiar with the 'movement'. There is little difference in form between relationships between a Daily Mirror editorial and its readers and a Trades Council speaker at the Pier Head and his audience of faithful militants. Both, perhaps unconsciously, are exercises in meaningless rhetoric and imagery. Repetition of stock phrases and symbols as substitute for realistic assessment of the situation and attempts to formulate new and creative ideas and strategies. The fact that the Daily Mirror serves the ruling class and the Trades Council the unions is beside the point - the relationship to the audience is the same. Even a paper as good, within the narrow confines it operates in, as Socialist Worker has gone as far as possible within the traditional framework. It still conceives of the readership as passive objects, at best sellers, it does not seek or succeed in transforming those relationships, nor the way of thinking of the masses.

The deficiencies of the left press are obviously not accidental, or technical. They are a product of bad politics. If the politics of the 'traditional left' conceive of the masses as an object in relation to the party, that is bound to be reflected in their propaganda and language. If their political ideas are rooted in pre-war capitalism, the slogans in the papers, e.g. nationalisation under workers control, right to work, are bound to become static and deficient. As we said before BE has not escaped these problems either, but we are aware of them. There is a widespread feeling that the newspaper does not fully match our political ideas. We often fall into the familiar trap of substituting our desire or image of reality for reality itself, e.g. in our imagery the ideal w/c militant is a council tenant on permanent rent strike; he/she sees that mortgages are a bourgeois trap. Unfortunately and for legitimate reasons more and more w/c people are owner occupiers - yet not once have we said anything worthwhile about mortgages. Too often also we continue to substitute rhetoric for realistic strategy, especially in relation to the 'general situation'. But to be aware of the problems is half the battle won ..... ultimately the solutions lie in our own developing experience and knowledge, systematic contact with the mass of the w/c through collective political practice and a thoroughgoing and continuous education programme and use of marxist method - so we can all learn to judge situations from their real starting point.

### SECTION B - THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED

#### Rationality and consciousness

"The problem of news propaganda is part of the general problem of culture and ideology, understanding 'news' is also understanding the culturally defined structure of public perception." (Powell, 'Types and variations in news photographs')

As the section on the media indicated, people do not take our propaganda into 'clear' minds. This "structure of public perception" does not only involve the media, but a conception of consciousness and how it is formed, within different cultural and ideological contexts. Two key questions in terms of newspapers and propaganda present themselves - firstly do people respond to rational argument and logic? And secondly, do people respond to the written word and if so, what kind of written word? (we deal with this later).

Firstly - do people respond to rational argument and logic - the papers of most of the left, including BF assume they do. When addressing themselves to the masses, they offer a series of logical reasons and arguments why people should believe or do certain things. Yet we have no real idea about how receptive people are. A theory of consciousness is the weak point of the revolutionary movement and the marxist tradition.

Research has indicated that people 'use' tv and filter its ideas and images according to their social/class situation. Up to a point they believe what they want to believe. There is no reason to believe that people relate to left propaganda any differently (although we are not referring here, of course, to 'advanced' militants). But we are working in a much more difficult situation than the bourgeois media. They do not present logical argument, but rely on myth and rhetoric. They do not present long closely argued articles, that require critical effort, as we do.

The result being that reading the left press require from the non-militant (and sometimes militants too) a critical break with their own habits and consciousness. The problem becomes worse because this consciousness is not merely the product of the manipulation of bourgeois ideology and media but is in elements of 'spontaneous' working class culture. W/C culture (i.e. the ways people live, relate to each other, organise, think) itself is based much on myth and personisation of political issues. As the next section shows, this is primarily because it is largely a direct and expressive verbal culture - open to distortion and lack of clear generalisation from 'class feeling' to revolutionary logic. A simple example indicates this. If any political perspective dominate anti-Toryism, it was 'Heath Out!' The intricacies of ruling class strategy, the plans of capital became subordinate to a shallow and personalised understanding of the 'Tory offensive'. It was a popular 'class feeling' and we rode with it - perhaps correctly. But we knew that Heat is merely a representation of capital, yet we issued a broadsheet that hinged around this feeling i.e. the picture of Heath - 'there are some people we just can't afford!' Depending on your viewpoint, we are either learning very fast the necessary manipulative techniques of the Daily Mirror etc. or pandering to illogical forms of consciousness. The point is however that the likes of the Daily Mirror would never be so successful, if its manipulation was not partially rooted in w/c culture itself and therefore receptive to it.

If our propaganda is to be effective on a mass level, we must realise that it has to penetrate various levels of consciousness. It reflects all the complexities of the social being of the w/c. It is dynamic, changing according to the movement and re-structuring of w/c life, to its struggles to live. It is made up of bourgeois ideas, filtered through w/c experience, of revolutionary ideas, appropriated and transformed by the w/c to provide sets of meanings for the struggle against capital. Class consciousness is therefore not only multi-layered but contradictory. It is neither subordinate to bourgeois ideology nor spontaneously developing and receptive to socialist ideas. The direction taken will depend on the balance of class forces, as consciousness crystallises around the major struggles and organisations.

Crucially in regard to propaganda it is also only partly rational. W/C consciousness is rational only in as much as it realises its real interests. As it is multi-layered and contradictory it can only realise such rationality in partial forms. Our propaganda is effective at the moment only in re-inforcing the positive elements of class consciousness. WE have not yet learnt how to confront, either in struggle or propaganda, the contradictory aspects, that are not as susceptible to revolutionary logic. The problem gets more complex because consciousness is also unconscious.

Marxist psychoanalysts like Reich and Fromm, building on the work of ~~Freud~~ Freud have shown that the impact of an idea depends partly on its unconscious content. Its effects will depend on how it relates to man's 'instinctual drives' e.g. for sex, pleasure, self-preservation etc. Such drives are socially conditioned by the specific social and environmental situations people XX find themselves in. While our political work takes little account of the power of such drives, capitalism does. Reich and the 'Sex-Pol' movement were one of the few attempts to come to grips with this problem. Our politics often seem external to peoples real needs, it fails to start from a revolutionising of everyday life, where instinctual drives are strongest. Capitalism however has many means of re-cuperating and partially satisfying the basically healthy ~~instinctual~~ instinctual drives. Sex drives can be postponed and repressed eg. through religion or diverted into safer waters eg. sex objects. The same goes for other 'drives' eg. the stimulation and satisfaction of sadistic impulses by identifying and displacing energy on to certain groups eg. blacks, XX XX or in wartime etc. The extreme right survives and in certain conditions flourishes through such manipulation. Nazi, fascist and racist propaganda is precisely based on the use of the the irrational sub-conscious.

Obviously our propaganda cannot, yet if we are to penetrate mass consciousness we must confront the same problems. Our papers will never be mass, unless our starting point is the contradictions of daily life. If this means articles on sex, sport, culture etc. then we will have to accept this, while seeking to transform its form and content. To be a mass paper (and we are not referring to circulation but to political reference point) we have to realise the level where people are at and what will appeal to them. The mass of people will not relate to long articles on the contradictions of imperialism, Europe versus America, the origins of the capitalist crisis etc. They are interested in how they affect them, their daily lives and what they can do about it. Again we are not advocating such a paper merely indicating part of its necessary basis, if we want a mass paper.

#### Language and the written word.

The second key question is - do people respond to the written word and if so what kind of written word? If they don't we are again in trouble. Because we don't have access to other forms of propaganda, or lack the imagination. Our propaganda is structural around the extensive use of the written word. This is in contrast to the tendencies inherent in the electronic media to present things in increasingly visual terms. Learning the use and power of the written word was once part of working class self education. Now this is partially decreasing, as people become dependent on tv, film, radio and record player (the decline of participatory musical culture, parallels the decline of the written word)

The process is however far from complete and there are counter tendencies. Adults in Britain read more newspapers than in any other

country; despite the limitations of their form, it must indicate the partial survival of the written word. Also more young w/c people are staying on at school, sometimes entering white collar jobs etc. all which mean knowledge of written vocabulary. But 15% of kids still leave school semi-illiterate - what consequences does this have for a mass newspaper?!

If we are forced to use the written word - what type? As we said before the left press is full of jargon and the language of the labour movement. Even much of BF's agitational writing in the paper is highly stylised and jargon ridden, not of the Labour movement - but from our own experience e.g. the use of the alien word 'struggle', the 'ruling class' 'linking' 'at the base' etc.

Reaching the masses with the structure of our political language is difficult. Not only because ours is jargon-ridden and 'stylised' but because mass language form has defects, which we have to confront. Due to the conditions in which people are brought up, relationships in the family, the isolation from a 'hostile' and bourgeois educational system etc. the language patterns of much of the w/c are restricted. That is they do not reach out for certain kinds of meanings. The form of the language makes it difficult to generalise from the particular 'here and now' 'us and them' situation, and make clear in richer vocabulary the goals people want to attain. As much of the language in the left press is created in generalities about the system and precise identification of meanings e.g. 'the employers' 'the plans of capital' etc. it appears as another alien and difficult form.

This is not to say, as some do, that the language of the middle or ruling classes is the universal form in which meanings are made clear and accessible to everybody. All language forms are rooted in the social and cultural context of particular class groups. 'Middle class' forms reflect the nature of their class position. The essence of bourgeois ideology is shown in the mystification of such terms as 'efficiency' 'productivity' 'rationality' 'the national interest' etc. Because they seek to impose this on other classes, they present such terms as neutral and value free. In the process they become devoid of real meaning, ideological abstractions. Like the rest of the m/c language it suffers from being over-concerned with form, abstract, stylised and unexpressive. Schools spend a long time destroying any direct and meaningful expression from such subjects as history, science and sociology in order that the products of the process may 'transact' with the system, in common language 'standard English'.

It is here that w/c language scores in its directness, expressiveness and orientation towards reflection of living experience. It is simultaneously strong and weak, yet the weakness i.e. lack of clarity and generalisation is crucial if people are to develop revolutionary consciousness. The development of such language forms is blocked not only by the things we have mentioned, but by the existence of organisations that 'represent' the w/c in action. Articulation and the ability to generalise develops through the experience of struggle. The most articulate working class people are those involved in the process of change. Unfortunately the effect is often to appropriate the experience for others. The shop steward will learn the 'language of negotiation' and help to mystify the factory struggle. The tenants leader will learn to structure and dominate meetings, through use of language and 'chairmanship'. Union branch meetings are often conducted in a highly formal way with abstract bureaucratic language that makes control and access to union affairs very difficult for the rank and file. We only have to look at the last miners strike to see how the way r & f miners saw the struggle and expressed it was determined by the language

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and concepts used by the union bureaucracy, i.e. the special case.

How does this affect the way we write or should write? Again it depends whether our reference points are militants or mass. If it is the latter the whole form of language has to be changed, as well as the form and content of the rest of the paper. But even for the former we need to review our use of terminology and the way we construct arguments. Crucial in this is to make a distinction between necessary scientific terminology, 'capital' 'autonomy' 'exploitation', imperialism' etc. which have to be used whether they are alien or not because to ignore them is to present a false picture of reality - and useless abstract jargon that characterises so much left wing writing, especially, or theoretical pieces. It can be eliminated precisely because it is a usual hangover from middle class training and education. We do however recognise that not everything can be written the same way. Theory requires study and highly developed knowledge, richer vocabulary - it does not merely reflect everyday experience. That is not to say that theoretical articles must be presented in such a form. They can be 'translated' into something more accessible, without losing much of their meaning. But the very fact that we acknowledge the necessity of 'translation' means we recognise the inevitability of different levels of knowledge, and language between 'vanguard' and 'mass'.

8) TASKS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PRESS

"Rather no leaflets than bad ones." (Reich)

The tasks of any revolutionary newspaper follow from the conditions it operates in. Both the general class situation, the necessary tactics and strategy that follow and the specific character our paper has, as an organ among others; related to the possibilities we have of organising and intervening in struggle.

But we have general goals, which give us general tasks. Our fundamental goal is to awaken and clarify the revolutionary consciousness of our readers, existing and potential. This means we cannot use the methods of the bourgeois media. Although we are opposed in principle to manipulative propaganda; what is more important in the long term is that it doesn't actually 'work.' A revolution cannot be made through manipulation - tough, but there it is. It has to be based on the existence among substantial layers of the population, of positive and critical self-consciousness and the ability to organise and struggle autonomously. Unless the separation between leaders and lead, active and passive etc. are broken down - unless revolutionary propaganda is based on truth and realism, not 'exposure' and manipulation, the system can contain and re-cuperate the struggle.

A 'revolutionary Daily Mirror' is an attractive thought. But such a paper based on the use of manipulative rhetoric and forms which do not challenge the structure of consciousness, the ways of thinking of a mass readership, is ultimately counter-productive. Already the left press veers toward such a model; making promises that can't be fulfilled, exhorting the masses to actions beyond the possibilities of the situation, calling for organisations that are impossible to build - projecting a false reality and bogus solutions on situations eg. elect alternative leadership - build the party etc are false or partial solutions that do not reflect the complexity of the problems faced in any given situation.

Truth is not a moral end in itself, it does not mean we 'dangle our secrets' under the noses of the authorities or never lie for tactical reasons - it is only a means of developing revolutionary consciousness. Our other tasks include preserving the meaning of all our news, putting even the most trivial in a context. This doesn't mean that we have to add "therefore we have to" to every article. But that individual parts and columns have to be closely related: a big fault in our newspaper, which is often a jumbled and incoherent mess.

We have another major fault which must be corrected if the tasks of a revolutionary newspaper are to be fulfilled. Our paper is still written for people, from the depths of the organisation. Activists at base group level are seldom involved and the readership is totally remote, feedback is minimal. It is no good issuing 'appeals' for more involvement, we have to make the form accessible (see later). The above does not mean that specialisation and division of labour are unnecessary. Clearly some degree is inevitable and desirable, both in terms of certain aspects of content eg. Spain, Ireland, fascism etc. and to a lesser extent, production eg. cartoons - especially as the group grows larger. But just as clearly there are areas of production and writing in which specialisation is a danger eg. general situation articles, - lay-out etc. which are a danger to the development of collective, non hierarchical political practice.



#### (4) THE ALTERNATIVES FACING BIG FLAME

The final section outlined two alternatives that were open. An agitational mass newspaper or a political magazine, both based on Merseyside. The document recommended the latter. A document aimed at a mass reference point (in the same way that leaflets are) was an attractive option, it would be a unique reference point of the left papers, a politically tighter version of some of the community type papers that reach comparatively wide audiences. It would require politically lower content, more news, shorter articles, more Merseyside - less foreign etc. We felt that such an option though, was not possible. It presumed a political stage of development we had not reached. That is a bigger group with strong local roots. At the time we were only really beginning to put down roots in the North End, Kirkby and Speke. It would also be practically impossible, given the level of resources needed. The magazine option, indicated that a monthly paper could never be 'news' orientated. It would also be aimed at militants, but with a wider conception of the term. That is including sectors of the community, woman and youth, anyone critical enough of things to want to read a revolutionary paper. It was seen as less of a back up of base-work and more a political generaliser ie. an indirect back-up.

A main influence on the choice was the fact that we were beginning to develop forms of propaganda that directly backed up the leaflets - ie. bulletins. The Docks and student groups had one and Kirkby was thinking about it. They were seen (with broadsheets) as the bridgehead between leaflets and newspaper. The 'magazine' paper would also be far more within our range of practical possibilities and more geared to the needs of our practice. That is, we needed something which could enable us to engage the many types of militants we were meeting in breaking down the BF centre into different localities, and trying to proletarianise the group. It also made national sales and interventions a better possibility.

The model would necessitate certain changes in content. Local stories that were longer, more researched and analytical, getting more behind the scenes of events rather than mere description. General situation articles that were more rooted in Merseyside. Front pages that even if about national situations, still reflecting Merseyside angles. No more re-hashes of old leaflets, but interesting articles about wider aspects of basic situations, intelligible to the wider audience of the paper. More articles of direct interest to woman and youth. This meant not trying to impose interests, but taking interests of these sectors, even if it was 'fashion', football or rock music and attempting to expand, clarify and amplify peoples' consciousness of these areas, without being hack or condescending. We would have to become more concerned with the politicisation of daily and basic interest/needs. Also more regular features and lay out in the context of a more planned and tighter paper. (suggestions included working-class history, economy, humour, reviews). Greater attempts to involve the readership in writing, feedback and selling. More attempts to contact articles via. taping comments/interviews, encouraging a letters page etc. More articles by people not in BF. It also meant two full-time editors.

#### A RETROSPECTIVE RE-EVALUATION

Many of the changes have been implemented in the year since the doc. was published. The full-time editors has proved a viable success, although it carries within it the dangers of over-specialisation and dependence in writing and lay-out. The Liverpool paper has suffered from being a substitute national paper, but we are still making advances on the local pages. We have been slow in getting the longer, more political local stories that Manchester do so well, off the ground, too much of our local stuff has been descriptive and short. There has been a greater tendency to cater for women readers, but there is still very little that would attract youthful readers. There has been a reluctance to have anything cultural in the paper, perhaps because it is so difficult. But it is probably to be regretted that a regular Review column has been dropped. A few of the other regular columns haven't come off, but the paper has been regularised, with the fixed International and 'Month on Merseyside' pages, which has improved form and content. One of the biggest failures has been its failure to become more open and involve the readership in writing and selling. The other major difficulty for the Liverpool paper has been the consolidation of the Bulletins, which has effected both content and sales. We discuss this problem in depth in the Liverpool editors' report.

PT. July '75....