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Class, mass news media, and the 1993 election

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Abstract

Using a class analysis of the mass media's performance during the 1993 general election, this paper argues that news is one important site for the production and dissemination of ideology, structured around the needs of capital. By focussing on the debate about 'structural reform' of the industrial relations system, the paper argues that the real agenda during the election was how Australian-based capital should deal with the international recession.

Introduction

All players in the political process recognise that the mass news media are a central arena of struggle during an election campaign (Tiffen, 1989). It is self-evident to politicians seeking election that media attention helps to 'get their message across' and their face known to voters. Tiffen identifies a number of features common to media coverage of election campaigns in Australia: 'herd journalism'; the importance of stunts and public performances compared to intense scrutiny of programmatic issues that divide the parties; and the reporting of the 'campaign as contest', which acts as a lens for reporting the campaign as a policy forum. But as Bell, Boehringer, & Crofts (1982) argue, it is the definition of 'politics' itself that should be the focus of research attention. Similarly, Pilger (1992, p. 13), for example, argues that the British media's definition of politics is limited to 'that which takes place inside, or within a short cab journey of the Palace of Westminster', or, in Australia, Parliament House.

This paper argues that a principal characteristic of the 1993 election was a critical debate about the future direction of Australian capitalism. This debate was reflected in the financial pages of the broadsheet press,

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and in material aimed at business audiences. Similar ideas also appeared in a different form in the populist, or tabloid, press, and in the electronic media.

The analysis follows Schudson’s (1989) work on ‘the sociology of news production’ and Gitlin’s (1980) notions of how news is ‘framed’ to support a ‘core system’ for the distribution of ideology. Herman’s & Chomsky’s (1988) ‘propaganda model’, which attempts to explain how news is filtered and dissent marginalised, is also relevant to this study. All of these approaches situate the production of news in a broader social context and attempt to explain why media ‘messages’ are constructed in particular ways.

While one can be critical of the closed nature of models that seem to deny the possibility of resistance, they are, at least, effective in locating a number of reasons why news is often structured in a way that protects and promotes the interests of the politically and economically dominant class. In this context, ‘class’ is used to denote a position located within the relations of production vis-à-vis the ownership and control of productive assets (capital). This approach is closer to that of Marxism than Weberian concepts of stratification (Baxter, Emmison, & Western, 1991, p. 54).

As Gitlin (1980) and Hallin (1986) argue, the ‘closure’ of the ‘propaganda model’ appears to be broken when there is division within the political elite. While support for the conservative side of politics is traditionally strong among the business elite, Labor has done much during the past decade to cement its relationship with corporate Australia. The relative ‘openness’ of the system is greater when there is confusion or disagreement within the dominant class. It is argued here that such divisions exist in Australia as a result of tensions over how to deal with the recession, principally the pace and extent of industrial relations ‘reform’.

When talking about class and the media it is necessary to make some comment on the position of journalists. While not able to give a definitive account in the space available, I suggest that an examination of the relations of production existing inside news organisations would show that journalists are predominantly wage labourers. However, they tend to be well-educated and well paid, putting them into what sociologists describe as the ‘middle class’ and, as numerous surveys (Henningham, 1993; Schultz, 1992) have shown, their social values (class position) tend to reflect this class location. As a result, for many journalists, ‘economic rationalism’ became the orthodoxy in the mid 1980s (Buckley, 1991) as it took hold of their peers in the bureaucracy and among economists.

The hegemony of this orthodoxy, and the routinism (Tiffen, 1989) of journalistic practice, help define the ideas and values that become news.
Gitlin (1980, p. 4) argues that these routines 'set within the economic and political interests of the news organisations, normally and regularly combine to select certain visions of reality over others'. Media commentator Gerard Henderson (1993, p. 3) argues that the routinism and 'pack' mentality of journalists in the Canberra Press Gallery led most of them to incorrectly predict a coalition victory in March 1993. Another factor, I would suggest, is the media consensus that developed around the orthodoxy of economic rationalism.

The worst recession in 60 years

As the economic crisis facing Australia and the rest of the world continues, capital must search for increasingly complex, or even elusive, solutions. The 1993 election put the media spotlight squarely onto this debate and provided an opportunity to examine the media's role.

Prior to the 1993 election, there had been a 15 per cent drop in the value of the Australian dollar against the US dollar (Kavanagh, 1993). National unemployment rose above one million in unadjusted terms during the campaign, and the official, seasonally adjusted rate was 10.9 per cent (Tingle, 1993, p. 1). Within this context, most media commentators predicted a Labor loss and a victory for the Liberal National coalition, citing Labor's tenth anniversary and its image as a tired government (McCran, 1993a).

The Coalition's failure to capitalise electorally on the recession has been explained by Labor's 'fear' campaign against the Opposition's 'radical' agenda (Smark, 1993a). Yet there is evidence from the opinion polls that neither party was particularly effective in convincing the electorate of the 'correctness' of its economic policies. For example, a poll conducted by AGB McNair for The Bulletin indicated a strong sentiment that neither party could significantly improve Australia's economic performance (O'Reilly, 1993a). Similarly, a Newspoll (1993) for The Australian reported that both John Hewson and Paul Keating retained their high unpopularity rating.

Related to a discussion of the overall economic scene were proposals to change the industrial relations system (Sloan, 1993). It can be argued, within the general economic climate, that these complex debates reflect the re-emergence of class as an issue in Australian politics. So too does Labor's reliance on its 'heartland' of passive working class support in the major cities for the 'sweetest victory' of all.

It has facetiously been suggested that there are as many theories as there are economists in the world (Ruehl, 1993, p. 56), but internationally there is consensus among 'orthodox' economists that wages and living standards must fall in order to push the cost of recovery onto workers (Harman, 1993, p. 47). This debate was taken up by editorial
writers and columnists during the election campaign and overwhe mingly they agreed that 'reform' of the wage-fixing system was central to any program for recovery. This was an explicit endorsement of capital's attempt to make workers pay for the crisis. As an editorial in the Australian Financial Review (1993a, p. 14) commented:

The truth is that some workers would be worse off in the medium term but that would be a small price to pay for genuine reform of the labour market.

This most clearly represents the response of Australian-based capital to the world recession (McCrann, 1993b, p. 31), where the issue for the ruling class continues to be, 'how to increase the rate of exploitation', that is, to increase the share of surplus value going to capital, at the expense of labour. It is what economics writer Geoff Kitney (1993, p. 11) meant when he said that the conservative parties wanted to shift the balance of power in the workplace away from labour and towards management.

Editorials: Ruling class opinion

With the exception of one Sydney paper, the Sun Herald, there was strong editorial support for the Coalition as leader writers developed a consensus that Labor would not be tough enough on its own working class base, nor would it carry out the necessary industrial relations reforms quickly enough.

The last issue of the Sydney Sun Herald (1993, p. 24) during the campaign period headed its editorial 'A critical choice', and continued:

The Sun-Herald believes this election is about the next government introducing a program which secures Australia's long-term future . . . The choice is yours.

The paper's editorial writer described the Labor Party as still 'too wedded to a craft-union base' and Dr Hewson as having a 'too theocratic approach to economic issues'. It suggested that both leaders were committed to economic reform and recovery, but added:

Dr Hewson intends to take us there faster, with less regard for casualties. Like an Irish stew, his administration could boil over. Paul Keating's approach is more managed. But he may be more selective about the tough decisions.

The Australian (1993a, p. 16) asked: 'Who can best promote and secure changes that will allow Australia to prosper over the next decade?'. The editorial gave its own answer, the Coalition, and went on to argue:

There are deep reservations about both sides, but the weight of argument lies with a change of government. The best way to maximise progress for economic reform is to give a Coalition government the chance to implement its ambitious agenda.
On the same day, Melbourne's Herald-Sun (1993, p. 12) said the Coalition was more prepared to take the bolder steps necessary to rescue the Australian economy, while the Telegraph Mirror blamed greedy workers for the recession and attacked the excesses of trade union power:

Historically this country's workforce has far too often resorted to the blunt instruments of industrial relations confrontation - the strike, the lockout, the go-slow, the work to rule, the demarcation dispute and the myriad of other techniques of disruption (1993, p. 13).

The editorials imply that it is necessary for 'Australians' to cut their living standards in order to improve the nation's economic performance, without acknowledging that the burden of cuts is not shared equally. Concrete examples of the impact of these cuts show that they fall most heavily on the working class (see, for example, The Socialist, 1993a, p. 3). The simple message that unions get in the way of the economy becoming more efficient is the economic 'orthodoxy'. There was broad consensus in the editorials that Labor had not done enough to 'reform' industrial relations. This attitude was summarised by the Australian Financial Review (1993b, p. 18):

In this election we are recommending a vote for the Coalition, precisely because Dr Hewson is more prepared than Mr Keating to press on vigorously with that reform process.

Many leading economics writers also seemed to support this consensus. As Windschuttle (1988, p. 342) says about news reporting of strikes and industrial issues:

Businessmen are not given homilies about the evils of unionism but rather advice on how to manage industrial relations.

Instead of highlighting the personalities and trivialising issues in the manner of the tabloids (Pilger, 1993, p. 11), the business press offered advice on how to deal with the recession, and gave a much more sober assessment of the economy.

One explanation of this process is the Marxist concept of the state apparatus in a capitalist society as being the 'executive committee' for the ruling class. As Harman (1993, p. 12) observes, the continuing intervention of the state into the economic life of the 'free market' is crucial to the process of restructuring capital and labour relations during a recession, in an attempt to restore the system to overall profitability. As an example, it is the Federal Labor government that must carry out the process of privatising Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank.

The actions of the state are the focus of several critical debates that impinge on capital. The state, as executive committee, must impose compromises in the interests of the ruling class as a whole (Lane, 1993a, p. 13). During an election campaign in a capitalist liberal-democracy, competition is intensified between the factions competing for control of the executive, and decision-makers need to be informed as to the
relative merits of the political programs on offer. The business press, writing for this audience, must honestly weigh up the alternatives and express an opinion consistent with the interests of its readers – the controllers and owners of capital.

A consensus for industrial relations reform

The Labor Party’s media campaign on industrial relations centred on protection of award conditions in a ‘safety net’ proposal, in contrast to the Opposition’s rapid deregulatory approach. The trade union movement funded a number of television commercials pushing this approach, in which the ALP appealed to the Australian ethos of ‘a fair go’ and characterised the Liberal National policy as grossly unfair, especially to low-paid and poorly organised workers. While the Opposition wanted to remove unions almost entirely from the bargaining process, Labor put its ten-year-old Accord with the ACTU at the centre of its platform.

In analysing the media’s discussion of industrial relations policies put forward by Labor and the Coalition during the election campaign, it becomes clear that there was, in fact, very little difference in substance between the parties. There was consensus that ‘reform’ of the relationship between employers and employees was the key issue. Both parties acknowledged the ‘need’ to embrace enterprise bargaining (Ellis, 1993, p. 34). In the months following the election it became clear that Labor’s policy on enterprise bargaining would mirror that of the defeated Liberal National parties, and changes to the indirect tax system in the August budget further underlined the similarities in policy.

What was in dispute during the campaign was the pace of industrial reform and the value, to capital collectively, of the Hewson ‘crash, or crash through’ approach. As well as embracing the unpopular GST, the Coalition was proposing an assault on the union movement and, while this was popular with some employer groups, notably Ian Spicer of the Chamber of Manufactures, others preferred to continue the profitable association they had with the government and the ACTU.

The ALP promised ‘more of the same’ consensus and the coalition a ‘new-broom, clean-sweep’ approach. The more astute commentators, however, already knew before March 13 that recent changes in the Australian industrial relations system were irrevocable. As Green (1993, p. 34) reported in The Australian, the differences between Labor and the Coalition were relatively minor. He suggested that the election outcome would not seriously alter the shift towards enterprise bargaining:

[t]he election of either a Keating or Hewson government will result in a strikingly similar outcome at the workplace which involves the dominance of enterprise bargaining and the death of central control over pay and conditions.
Green's article detailed the types of agreements between the ACTU and the Keating government: to give away centralised wage fixing; accept enterprise bargaining; and cut the powers of the Industrial Relations Commission. Less than six weeks later Green's analysis was shown to be accurate. Prime Minister Keating announced a downgrading of Awards and the Industrial Relations Commission in a speech to the Institute of Australian Company Directors. He told the audience that unemployment would remain high, that he wanted more enterprise deals signed, and that there would be 'sensible intervention' in the economy by his government (Lewis, 1993, p. 1). The Prime Minister wanted to reassure employers and business leaders that the second Keating government would not abandon them. The Socialist (1993b, p. 3) described the Prime Minister's speech as 'nothing more than a warmed over version of Liberal policy'. During the election the ACTU agreed to dismantle the award system and relegate the Industrial Relations Commission to 'rubber stamp' status (Tingle & Green, 1993, p. 1).

The trade union bureaucracy in a capitalist society has the role of fixing the price for labour, which it does in a series of negotiations with employer representatives. The links between the political wing (the Labor party) and the industrial wing (the union bureaucracy) of the labour movement have created a highly controlled environment in which labour prices are settled. Molyneux (1978, p. 66) writes that the union leadership is raised to a privileged position vis-à-vis the membership, 'as mediators between the classes, and therefore they have a direct interest in social peace'. Rank and file trade unionism has atrophied in this climate, leading some commentators to suggest that unionism is politically, as well as numerically, in decline. In some quarters this too has become part of the 'orthodoxy' that is repeated in news reports and commentary pieces. The 'orthodoxy' is, however, subject to challenge, as noted by David O'Reilly in The Bulletin (1993b, p. 19) in an article about the 'new' working class of white collar employees.

During the election, journalist Steve Burrell (1993a, p. 21) wrote that Labor's pro-capital policies, 'left Australian business in a pleasant dilemma'. He also realised (1993b, p. 17) that Labor would have to renege on promised tax and interest rate cuts. Following the election, an editorial in The Australian (1993b, p. 18) described the new ethos of the Labor Party 'a synthesis of managed economic reform and a traditional Australian commitment to social justice and egalitarianism'. Labor's continued occupation of the middle ground in Australian politics had a 'knock-on effect' that has 'sent the free-market Liberals to the political margins'. An alternative explanation was offered by the left: the anger built up through ten years of Labor's Accord and wage-cutting was deflected against the conservatives by Paul Keating's clever manipulation of the rhetoric of 'fairness' and the perception among workers that the Hewson 'alternative'
would be far worse (see for example, *The Socialist*, 1993a, p. 3). As another example, *The Socialist* (1993b, p. 5) wrote:

In reality, enterprise bargaining [under Labor] has involved massive workplace restructuring with workers trading off jobs and hard-won working conditions in exchange for puny wage increases.

**The coverage of ‘class’ in the Australian media**

It is unnecessary to rely on conspiracy theories among media proprietors to explain bias, or the media’s support for the rule of capital. In the past, direct intervention, by an older generation of the Fairfax, Murdoch, and Packer dynasties, has been overt, but it is now argued that those days are over (Parker, 1990, p. 6). Privately owned newspapers, television, and radio are themselves profit-oriented capital with links into the international world of monopoly capitalism (Windschuttle, 1988), and the government-financed media (ABC, SBS) most often follow the same news agenda, as well as being managed in much the same way as commercial media by people with similar social backgrounds. This suggests a common class interest.

After the election, *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist, Peter Smark (1993c, p.11), joked about the notion of a media conspiracy against Labor:

In our attempts at fairness, they find a media plot, a newspaper’s schemed campaign against Labor and deep-set personal prejudice ... I wish I was as sure of Australia’s future best interests as to arrange a campaign either for or against either side.

This light-hearted aside does not seriously address the issue of media bias. ‘News’ is constructed in such a way that it reflects the interests of capital and contributes to the manufacture of consent on the part of the subject classes. Each section of the press has a different role within this overall ideological function, it can be argued, which can be broadly defined as: tabloids – confuse and divide the working class; broadsheets – reassure the ‘middle class’; the business press – conduct rational debate for capital. Gitlin (1980) notes that these conventional definitions ‘originate, persist and shift in historical time’ and that the news media ‘cannot afford to ignore big ideological changes’. In this way the media is under the same pressures as the rest of society to cope with the contradictions inherent in class society.

The business press codifies and circulates vital information between the managers and owners of capital, and, as Windschuttle (1988) shows, it tends to offer realistic advice, rather than the mis-information aimed at a wider, working class audience.

In their role as the producers of an ‘economic ideology’ for capitalism (Harman, 1990, p. 12), establishment economists, and their disciples in the media, are always in a position to offer useful insights into the
problems of the system. Sometimes the honesty of their assessments must cause knowledgeable readers to wonder if capitalism has any future at all. Journalist Terry McCrann (1993b, p. 31) made this clear when he described the severity of Australia's current recession, and said it will get worse, 'unless we face up to revolutionary change in our economic and social lifestyle'. In a column and a half on the size of the problem, McCrann had only two lines of advice:

   The simple message is that major structural change is required in the labour market.

   Structural 'reform' and 'deregulation' have become the economic orthodoxy of the 1990s and are looked to everywhere to provide capitalism with answers to the recession (Harman, 1990, p. 30). Discussion of the federal election in the business press assumed the necessity of change on such a scale, and was structured around it.

   The broadsheet print media, the ABC, and SBS, can be seen as forums for informed speculation, and the expression of diverse viewpoints, but they limit the discussion of 'politics' to the definitions allowed by the professional values of the journalists and editors who come from this same milieu (Bell et. al, 1982, p. 106; Callinicos, 1983, p. 105). Another way of describing the parameters of debate is to use the spheres of 'consensus' and 'legitimate controversy' outlined by Hallin (1986, p. 117). In this model, the parameters of debate and controversy are 'defined primarily by the two-party system', and '[within this region, objectivity and balance reign as the supreme journalistic values' (Hallin, 1986, p. 116).

   The traditional audience for broadsheet journalism is the educated blue and white collar working class, professionals, and middle management. This layer is described as the 'middle class', but its upper and lower echelons are fluid. Current work on this stratum is mainly descriptive in the Australian context, but it reflects the growing 'complexity in the social division of labour' (Baxter, et. al., 1991, p. 49). While Baxter and her colleagues tend to down play the efficacy of a Marxist interpretation of class, I find it useful to refer to Braverman's (1975) concept of 'proletarianisation' of work in this middle stratum.

   At the top end, this middle class stratum begins to blend into the ruling class and constitutes those whose function is the control and surveillance of labour (Callinicos, p. 99). While at the lower end (nurses, teachers, public servants) it is almost indistinguishable from the traditional 'proletariat' in its relationship to capital (Callinicos, p. 104). This layer of workers is subject to the same pressure, to cut living standards, as more 'traditional' sections of the working class. They also tend to react in the same way, by looking to their unions for leadership. Thus, while traditional blue collar union membership has declined, because of
large scale redundancies in extractive and manufacturing industries, there has been a rapid growth of ‘white collar’ unionism in the service sector. In the months following the March 1993 election, bank workers and public servants took action over wages and jobs. There was also a union revolt over the inclusion of non-union members in enterprise bargaining deals, which resulted in tough resolutions at the September 1993 congress of the ACTU in Sydney.

The social status of the ‘middle class’ is dropping as white collar work is automated, devalued, or dispensed with (Braverman, 1975; Callinicos, 1983). The ‘middle class’ is being reconstituted as a ‘grey collar’ class, as the recession pushes down the living standards of ‘white collar’ employees in the service sector. Manning (1993) suggests this stratum is an important base for the Labor Party, and was a factor in its winning the 1993 election. Indeed, social democratic parties world wide have shifted ground to accommodate the aspirations of this layer (Callinicos, pp. 109-115), and the ALP is no exception (Callick, 1993, p. 14; O'Reilly, 1993b, p. 19).

The commentary in the broadsheet press broadly, but unevenly, reflects this climate of change in what is popularly known as ‘the middle class’ (Mackay, 1993, p. 17). For example, some columnists took the election seriously, while others revelled in the apparent contradictions and ‘paradoxes’ of the campaign (Smark, 1993b, p. 13).

There was also a recognition that the dynamics of class are likely to reassert themselves in conditions of crisis (Horin, 1993, p. 15). After writing that tax cuts promised by both sides during the election will not benefit low income workers (many of them young women), Horin commented in the Sydney Morning Herald that, ‘talk of a classless society rings of sentimental hogwash’. Her article highlights the fact that many people who thought themselves secure in the ‘middle class’ are now anxious about their future. What she is describing, without naming it, is the impact of the economic crisis: that is, the middle class feeling the pressure of government policies designed to push the burden of the crisis on to wage and salary earners, who had been, in better times, part of the comfortable status quo providing support for the system.

Another Sydney Morning Herald columnist Mike Seccombe (1993, p. 6) amplified this point when he noted that the income divide between rich and poor is growing, while, ‘those in the middle are disappearing’, and Mills (1993, p. 4) wrote of the ‘anger among the middle class’. Callinicos (1983, p. 114) partly explains this anger by highlighting cuts to so-called ‘middle class welfare’ necessitated by the economic downturn. In The Australian, Milne (1993, pp. 17-18) made similar points, but argued that the only basis for economic recovery is for one of the major parties to be given a working parliamentary mandate, confirming the Hallin thesis on the role of ‘objectivity and balance’ in journalism, and supporting Gitlin’s comment that journalism’s more regular ap-
proach is to process, control, and diffuse opposition by directing it into safe (for the system) channels (Gitlin, 1980, p. 5).

As the ‘middle class’, including journalists, is further squeezed by the recession, we may see more of this insightful and critical writing. As noted above, the reality of the downturn cannot be ignored by the media, especially when the ‘audience’ experiences it on a daily basis. The class position of journalists is certainly a question that must be addressed in order to establish an understanding of the relationship between those who write the news and what they write.

While the broadsheet media caters for those in contradictory class locations, broadly defined as the ‘middle class’, the tabloids offer a diet of infotainment that allows only for ‘consensual interpretations’ of reality (Windschuttle, 1988 p. 271). In an election period, the tabloid press and prime time commercial television focus broadly on the personalities of the leaders (Windschuttle, p. 281), the ‘horse race’ aspects of the campaign (Tiffen, 1989, p. 132), and the impact of competing policies on the ‘ordinary’ person in the street. This constructs an atomised and classless audience, in which:

individuals are constantly asked to respond in individualistic terms, never in terms of any communal, let alone economically defined [class] interests (Bell, et.al, p. 53).

A clear example of this style is provided by a front page Telegraph Mirror story about two fruit stall holders in Parramatta, ‘Polls apart on the fruit cart’ (Keneally, 1993, p. 1), and another headlined, ‘Down home, bets on Hewson and Keating are mixed’ (Mevissen, 1993, p. 27). The Telegraph Mirror took this approach further when reporting the Liberal Party’s campaign launch at which five ‘ordinary’ people described how they had become ‘victims’ of Labor’s decade in office. The paper tagged its story ‘The voice of the real people’, obscuring the fact that the Liberal Party had selected the participants and carefully orchestrated their appearance at the rally. The Telegraph Mirror’s [then] chief political reporter, Amanda Buckley (1993, pp. 4-5), was even moved to comment that:

It was their very authenticity that made them out of place at what started off as a glitzy artificial Liberal launch.

Another way the tabloid media carries out the function of obscuring class relations is to describe everyone as ‘Australian’, and issue editorial paens to patriotism and the national interest.

The Sydney Sunday tabloid, the Sun-Herald, appealed to nationalism when asking readers to cooperate with which ever party might win, to secure ‘Australia’s long-term future’, by recognising that the restructuring of the economy means, ‘Australians must accept a lower standard of living, in the short term at least’ (1993, p. 24).
The tabloid media is not alone in promoting the concept of a classless, egalitarian Australia. This nationalist tradition is as old as the White Australia policy and is used extensively in advertising, finding political expression in the rhetoric of Labor governments (Hirst, 1983, p. 32). It is also recognised as being inherently racist, tied as it is to the colonial dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants, and the fact that there was no struggle for self-determination in the nation-building process (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope, & Morrissey, 1988, p. 9).

The former tabloid journalist, Amanda Buckley, (1991, pp. 97-105) [she now writes for the more up-market Age] has argued that for tabloid papers to run stories about federal politics, they ‘have to mean something to real people’, which means making them ‘relevant’, taking the audience into account, and removing ‘jargon’ from the copy. The simplistic language and colourful images of the tabloids mask a serious political agenda: to help with the incorporation of the working class into a system that is antagonistic to its interests.

Windschuttle (1988, p. 275) argues that the tabloid press reflects the contradictory way in which workers experience capitalism, and must therefore accommodate their sensibilities and tastes. He writes that bad news, ‘exposes the contradiction at the heart of the system, and the media has to constantly perform a second task of papering over the divisions thus exposed and calming the anxieties news itself raises’ (p. 278). The tabloids (and to some extent television) manage this dual function using the incorporative focus of ‘personality’ news, or what Windschuttle calls, the politics of celebrity, and by the use of language/image coding to manufacture attitudes towards so-called ‘deviant’ behaviour, such as crime.

**A cultural victory for Labor?**

There was talk of ‘radical’ agendas on both sides of politics during the campaign and, to some extent, a departure from the normal style of campaigning. Prime Minister Keating decried the ‘radicalism’ of Hewson’s lifestyle-threatening GST and industrial reforms, while at the same time claiming for himself the mantle of ‘radical’ reformer of the corporate tax system in a speech to the National Press Club.

It is popularly believed by the media, and by a number of defeated Coalition figures, that the electorate rejected the far too ‘radical’ Goods and Services Tax. *The Australian* (1993b, p. 18) advised Dr Hewson to recognise from the election result that voters are not hostile to changes, but are: sceptical of radical change and they want leaders putting radical ideas to explain those ideas, in particular their social dimensions. The moral for the Liberals is reforms must be pitched with a positive appeal to mainstream values.
The ALP won the 1993 election because it was able to exploit voters’ uncertainty about their future, and because of a residual class identity among workers that is projected onto the Labor party. As Manning (1993, p. 2) says, the recession has hit white collar workers just as hard as the ‘core’ of the working class in blue collar industries. Unlike many observers of politics, bound as they are to the ‘sphere of legitimate controversy’ (Hallin, 1986), Manning recognises that workers intuitively understand that their interests are not necessarily best served by the new ‘orthodoxy’ of enterprise bargaining, the ‘erosion’ of the health care system, or cutting state support for education (Manning, 1993, p. 2).

The re-emergence of class in a discourse on the media

The global recession has created what at least one writer has accurately described as the twin crises of economics and ideology. The 1993 Australian election was held against this international backdrop and both major parties were aware of the stakes involved (Stone, 1993). A win for the Coalition could have signalled an all out attack on trade unions and living standards in line with Dr Hewson’s avowedly pro-market ideology. While the Labor victory has postponed this conflict temporarily, the underlying causes of downturn continue to assert themselves.

As we have witnessed since the election, the ALP is confronting resistance to its policies both inside and outside Parliament. The debate about the ‘way forward’ for Australian capitalism is far from resolved, and the parameters apparent through the election coverage are still operating. As noted above, a number of journalists have begun to reassess the convenient myth of the disappearance of class tensions in Australia, and Manning’s short paper, Why Labor won the 1993 Federal Election: an Unconventional View, has been reviewed in The Bulletin (October 5, 1993). As David O’Reilly suggests, Manning’s paper may become required reading for politicians, ‘for it spells out a contemporary development each must confront’ (1993b, p. 19).

As a point of departure, the initial analysis presented in this paper shows that the structure of the print media reflects and reinforces the class structure of capitalism. Each level of the press has a particular function in relation to the market segment at which it is aimed, and they combine to produce a comprehensive, and hegemonic, but not closed, ideology. The construction of ‘news’ and ‘opinion’ through the media sustains capitalism by the manufacture of consent (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), but in an era of economic crisis and instability, the fabric of consent begins to fray around the seams.
As Australia and the world head towards the end of the 20th century, economic uncertainty is likely to increase in response to the pressure of global recession, and the ability of the media to bind together classes that are in conflict may be diminished. Without a class analysis – both of the economy (capitalism) and the media (as the site for the production and dissemination of ideology) – such trends are obscured.

If Harman (1993, p. 51) is right when he writes that social trends indicate 'there is much less reason for those who run capitalism to be optimistic than they [had] even at the beginning of the 1980s', then the question of class could once again push itself into popular consciousness, despite the news media's best efforts to ignore it.

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