

Lecture 8a – The Media:

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The present political system would not work today without the Media – which functions as one of the main areas of political debate

Newer developments such as satellite-TV, Internet, digital broadcasting are growing in number + importance, and are affecting the relationship between political government and the Media

NB: This lecture concentrates on **the Press** and **Broadcasting**

The National Press

The Press is called "the 4th estate" (= the analytical + critical 'institution')

There are 10 national dailies, ca 80 regional 'dailies', and a number of weekly/Sunday newspapers

The 10 national dailies are well-established, and have a much wider readership than the regional dailies (barring Scotland)

These 10 dailies are either **broadsheets (quality)** or **tabloids (popular)**

Together they present a predominantly conservative view

A general criticism of the British Press is that it is not 'serious':

- 1) it is "superficial", "predictable" and "trivial"
- 2) commercial interests dictate style + content

ALL national papers are economically independent of government + political parties:

- 1) they are financed through their sales + advertisement earnings
- 2) government subsidises **indirectly** through extensive/increasing government advertising + 0% VAT

NB: 3 giant corporations now own 8 of the 10 national dailies – giving growing concern about editorial freedom/democracy/commercialism in relation to this concentration of media-ownership.

Broadcasting (Radio + TV):

The BBC was created as a **public corporation** – answerable to and financed via Parliament (licence fees/subscriptions) – in 1926:

Radio dominated until 'the TV revolution' in the 50s

Today we are at the beginning of a new 'revolution' in broadcasting: digital TV-transmission / sky channels with a pay-market viewer choice

As with so much else in Britain – there is **indirect** government control:

The Government appoints the Chairman + the Board of Governors as well as draws up the Charter for the **BBC**

This body then appoints the BBC leadership

Government control is maintained through the right of programme veto

The Government is also well-represented on the **Independent TV Commission (ITC)**

The ITC controls the 16 regional independent stations by issuing licenses to commercial companies – (in accordance with 1990 Broadcasting Act = the Conservatives attempt to put TV on the free market)

Each of these 16 "Channel 3"(ITV) companies provides programmes for its region + goes together to provide nationwide programmes (e.g. the News)

The Broadcast Standards Commission – a QUANGO (= economically supported by the Government) conducts research into the accuracy + impartiality of broadcasters + investigates complaints

- **commercialism** is believed, by many, to be having an adverse effect on the quality AND impartiality of the media:

- 'quality' papers write shorter articles and give more space to sport + "human interest" topics

- the politically-investigative news and current affairs programmes on TV (e.g. "Panorama") are now off "prime time" and replaced by soaps /human interest stories/entertainment /info-tainment programmes

NB: the Official Secrets Act (1911) was up until the 1990s a constant threat to investigative journalism.