

class and this is achieved, according to instrumental Marxists, through the media. Because the media is a major source of information about society it is used as a **tool** (or instrument) through which ideas, beliefs and behaviours are manipulated. Ownership and control, therefore, is used to create a picture of the social world beneficial to the interests of

the most powerful people in society – and a key idea here is **false consciousness**. By their ability to control and limit the information people receive, a ruling class is able to control how people think – both directly and indirectly – about the things happening in society.

An example of false consciousness can be demonstrated with respect to the war in Iraq. From this perspective people were manipulated into supporting the war on the basis of Iraq having ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (which, we were repeatedly informed, could be used to launch an attack ‘within 45 minutes’). We will return to this idea when, in the next section, we look at the relationship between the media and ideology in more detail.

Discussion questions: evaluating this perspective

To help you reflect critically about this perspective, think about and discuss the following questions.

- **Conspiracy theory:** Does this perspective develop a conspiratorial view of the media and the role of owners? Why do some parts of the media criticise the activities of powerful individuals, companies and governments?
- **Ruling class:** Do all members of the bourgeoisie have the same interests and, if so, what are they and how do media owners know what they are?
- **Choice:** In terms of old media there is a range of choices available, giving audiences access to different viewpoints; many people also have access to a wide range of new media. How easy is it for a ruling class to control the way people think when such choices are available?
- **Audience:** Are media consumers simply passive recipients of whatever owners want to publish, or are they more sophisticated and reflecting? Are some parts of the media audience (such as children) more open to influence than others?

Neo-(hegemonic) Marxism



Preparing the ground

Neo-Marxists such **E.O.Wright** (*Classes*, 1985) take a different approach to their traditional counterparts and, initially, the main points to note relating to this perspective are:

- **Social class** is *not* a static (unchanging) classification system; rather, it’s seen (or conceptualised if you prefer) as a dynamic system of shifting and changing social relationships. This suggests:
- **Conflict**, divisions and contradictions occur *within* a dominant (or ruling) class.