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WHO CAN CORRECT THE MEDIA?

by Lemuel R. Boulware

Mr. Boulware is an author, speaker, and communications consultant. He delivered this paper to a group of Hillsdale College students and faculty during the seminar of the Center for Constructive Alternatives entitled The American Communications Media: A Study in Credibility.

All of us here seem fully convinced — as do many folks elsewhere — that the media's influence is heavily weighted against our free choice system and toward the ever increasing public acceptance of the welfare state's false promise of something-for-nothing, to be secured for the many from the few through immoral gang force imposed at the ballot box, on the picket line, or by other politically privileged violence.

Of course, there are some happy exceptions to this bias. But they are still so relatively few as to make no real difference in the overall effect.

This effect is daily to mislead further the already misled members of the still sovereign public majority. These people are being led increasingly to think and act exactly opposite to the interests of each of them in their multiple roles as earners, consumers, savers, directors of their agents, lovers of free choice, and prizers of personal safety.

For instance, the resulting contrived hostility to business in general, and to profit in particular, is preventing business from being as useful as it could be in doing what the members of the majority want most.

For not just profit is under this successful attack. Private property and personal freedom are inescapably caught in the same deepening trouble. Both history and our own experience teach that profit, private property, and individual liberty are inseparable. We simply cannot expect to have any one unless we also have both the others at the same time.

This means that the media's present activities are damaging not just some few for the erroneously assumed benefit of the many. What is really resulting is that the majority is thus damaging its own property and freedom — i.e., it is being misled into an increasingly lethal attack on the real income, the

savings, the homes, the cars, the TV's, the pensions, the insurance, the free choice and the personal safety of just about everybody.

This running attack by the media on our basic economic and political system is getting more support now from educators, union officials, clergymen and government representatives. There is not space here for the details but they have just been made amply available elsewhere (see "Profit Peril" by L. R. Boulware, Pepperdine University Press).

Who Will Not Do The Corrective Job Needed?

In the face of constantly hearing only one side of what should be a dialogue on what's so and what isn't, we cannot expect our easygoing public majority to arrive at the correct answers suddenly on its own. The majority has to have help in acquiring the economic information, moral alertness, and political sophistication increasingly needed to carry out the majority's responsibility to itself in this matter of the media, as well as in others.

In all fairness meanwhile, we cannot expect the media to correct their own course in the public interest until the listening and reading public has shown it is ready to demand, welcome or tolerate that change.

Despite the happy exceptions, most editors, columnists, reporters, commentators and entertainers slant their offerings to fit in gratifyingly with the misled public majority's false expectations and emotional bias. And too many of these media communicators have come to seek openly or subtly to increase such expectations and bias.

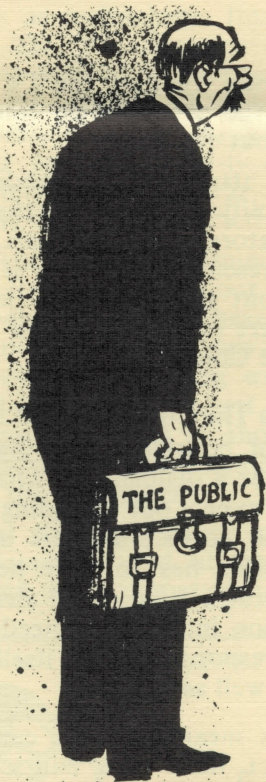
Despite the media owners and managers being in business to make the profit required for usefulness and survival, they have no choice but to be a party to the constant damage to their own, their advertisers',

im•pri•mis (im-pri' mis) adv. In the first place. Middle English, from Latin *in primis*, among the first (things). . .

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and the public's interest by what is being taught in their own media. The reason is that they must sell advertising to enable them to supply the news, opinion, and entertainment which in turn attracts and keeps the audience the media must deliver to the advertiser. This means that what the media say and print must stay within what that audience likes or at least tolerates, or there will be no audience to deliver.

And the advertiser, like the media's owners and managers, is caught in the expensively contradictory situation where, in order to reach a profitable mass audience at the moment, he has no choice but to support media which effectively preach his own destruction while he supports them.



Even those media owners and communicators who would like to change cannot be expected to do so until others have changed the public majority's understanding enough to foster "good publishing" and "good broadcasting" which will help with the rest of the corrective teaching needed.

Most of those educators who would openly like to change what they are teaching cannot be expected to risk their jobs and their futures by offending powerfully placed people through first disillusioning and then properly informing the students — until others have pioneered enough corrective teaching to deem that as "good education" in the opinion of parents, school boards, fellow faculty members, union officials, legislative appropriators, and alumni contributors.

Even what is now being wrongly taught at the mother's knee is not going to be changed for the

good of both mother and child until others have made better teaching available.

Most clergymen cannot risk disillusioning their congregations about the immorality — let alone the impracticality — of the quest for something-for-nothing until others have begun to make such corrective action palatable to the church-goers.

Most political representatives in unions and government cannot be expected to risk losing votes by disagreeing with a current consensus before others have made it safely "good politics" to do so.

So young and old in the public majority are not going to see the corrective teaching initiated by any of the usual sources of education in economics, morals, and political sophistication.

Yet the individual members of the public have the basic responsibility to know what they should do themselves and what they should have their representatives do. Of course, certain advantaged citizens have the clear obligation to help as leaders in thought. But if the individual members of the public majority do not get that help — and do not competently choose between sound and unsound leadership — it is still their responsibility to see that they do not pay for their malfeasance as free citizens by having their decision-making usurped by a dictator.

For instance, if the majority's misunderstanding about the cause of inflation and the function of profit is not promptly corrected, I reluctantly but firmly believe that the public — with the best of intentions — will soon decree that its political representatives permit no profit as long as prices seem too high. In the absence of the corrective education needed, prices are going to seem too high for a long, long time. But this decree would do vast and perhaps irreversible damage to the economic system.

Even if profit is not entirely wiped out, but only further diminished by controls and other forces now at work, by that much prices will still be higher, sales less, jobs fewer, values poorer, real pay lower, needed or wanted goods in scarcer supply and business further debilitated.

Information The Public Needs

This corrective information — which most citizens need now for competent thought and action concerning just prices and profits — is exactly what will equip them to see through unreliable media performance and to demand and get the reliable brand. For this I believe it necessary for them to understand these ten sets of facts which I have covered in detail elsewhere but can list here in capsule form: (In *What You Can Do About Inflation, Unemployment, Productivity, Profit, and Collective Bargaining* by L. R. Boulware, Loeffler & Co., San Diego, California.)

1. The individual member of the public is solely responsible for what is going on. He cannot pass the buck to his agents in government, unions,

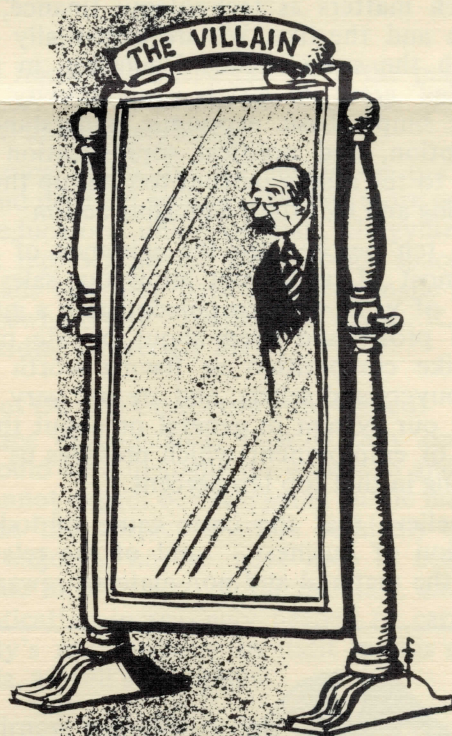
and business. He has to understand he is the problem and only he can solve it.

2. Freedom – like private property – has a moral base and a moral requirement. Our freedom was not won from George III forever, but has to be won all over again every day by a safe majority of citizens knowing what is right for them and their agents to do for the individual and common good – and then seeing that each person does that right thing voluntarily, while requiring of his agents that they do right also.
3. Business is not – as so often charged – an exploiter of the many for the benefit of the few. Business is itself the many. It is simply a way people come together to do more for each other than would be possible without the arm-lengthening facilities and direction supplied by owners and managers. Exceptions to the good performance of business should be kept in perspective and not thought to be the rule.
4. Consumers pay most all the expenses of any business which long survives. These expenses include not only all employee cost but also purchases, interest, charity, waste, and all taxes – even income taxes.
5. Consumers likewise pay directly or indirectly most all the expenses of government, which today take about thirty-five percent of the income of everybody combined.
6. Inflation is not caused by war, business greed, or government supplying those services for which the public is willing to pay. Inflation comes only from the government creating extra money for which there are not extra goods to match. This inherently worthless extra money is created for two major purposes which the public servants consider “good politics” to serve:
 - a. To provide money for the government to pay for those goods and services which the majority wants the public to receive at so-called “government expense,” but for which the public would flatly refuse to pay if it knew it was paying the cost – as it does – through the brutal and purposely deceitful tax of inflation.
 - b. To pump out added worthless cash to increase the number and cut the value of all the public’s dollars, so that consumers will have enough cheapened dollars to buy at the higher consumer prices necessitated by artificially raised pay. This higher pay – in the absence of higher output to match – would otherwise only kill or reduce jobs.

Inflation cannot be arrested by controls on prices, but must be halted by gradually removing the inflation from costs. If inflation were suddenly stopped altogether there would be a disastrous contraction of sales, jobs, profits, and solvency of both consumers and businesses. As one illustration of this, we must continue to cheapen money during the next three years to wipe out the otherwise

sales-killing and job-killing effect of the union contracts which require pay increases unmatched by increases in goods.

7. Unemployment comes solely from the unemployed worker demanding more than his prospective employer can recover from consumers for the work which would be done.
8. The only way we can live better is to produce more for each other.
9. Profit does not cause high prices but forces them to be much lower than they would be without the profit motive. Profit benefits the non-owners, including the poor man, much more than it does the owners of a business. It is the greatest engine of human betterment ever devised by man.



10. The perfectly good original theory of unions has gone far astray in practice. This departure is costly to everyone in jobs, prices, savings, freedom and personal safety. Only a freshly informed and sophisticated public majority can supply the final support necessary to enable union members, union officials, businessmen and government to get the unions back on the right track.

Again, the foregoing are only suggestions of what is amply available not only in my book but in many others by much more authoritative writers.

Who Can And Should Tell?

For reasons covered earlier, the public majority cannot expect to get the needed corrective information from most of the media, educators, clergy, and public servants until the public itself has first shown this information will be welcomed rather than resented.

Who then is left with both the opportunity and obligation to initiate the corrective education which will enable the public majority to demand and get sounder media and – by the same process – to get sounder advisers in education and religion and more truly responsible agents in unions and government?

I believe it is clear that those of us who are in the advantaged top ten percent in business and the professions are the ones with the opportunity, the obligation, and the simple and safe means to do the corrective job now so urgently needed in our own and the common interest.

We here – and the rest of the advantaged top ten percent elsewhere – daily supply needed and welcome leadership in thought to the other ninety percent in such matters as technology, finance, commerce, health and the like. We are potentially available to furnish the same needed leadership in the now so troubled areas of prices, productivity and profit where simple basic economic understanding, moral perception, and political sophistication can be relayed to the ninety percent to clear up their confused thinking and halt their damaging action.

We ten percent are the salesmen of our system. Yet most of us do not know our sales story. Too many of us in the ten percent have a guilt complex about profit and even about private property, do not like competition or having worth decided by free buyers and sellers, and are not very enthusiastic about our system in general or about the particular place of employment which provides us with a level of living in that top ten percent.

I believe that the basic cause of today's critical situation of business – and of the related peril to both the material and non-material rewards available

under our system – is in our failure to keep ourselves competent – and to help the others become competent – to understand and handle the increasingly complex problems of the free man living in an ever more complicated society.

Whether my offerings or the better ideas of others are followed, the ten percent needs to get at the required corrective work at once – not only to enable or require the media to be more responsible but also to protect everything else we hold most dear.

I hope you agree, and that the attention you have just given this urgent need will not be the end but the beginning of a still further stepped-up effort.

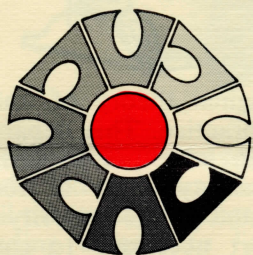
No people in history have been free for very long. The loss of their previously hard-won freedom was always deserved – because of a declining realization of just how valuable the freedom was, and how worthwhile it was to keep making the investment in economic competence, moral fortitude, and political sophistication required for turning back the would-be usurpers at home and from abroad.

We will be the losers if we do not heed the lessons of history and keep our system healthy and secure.

I promise to keep trying to do my part – and for two reasons.

First, our system has been good to me, and I feel at seventy-eight a still unmet obligation in return.

Second, and in a less noble vein, I am good and scared. My mother lived to 103, and I am sure that unless the current trend is reversed, both you and I are not going to like what is done to us in my remaining twenty-five years.



Center for constructive alternatives ©

Hillsdale College is proud to have recently received the entire personal library of Dr. Ludwig von Mises, the dean of Austrian School Economics. As one of the foremost economists of our age, he left an inspired legacy of many books and articles written in defense of individual liberty.

Dr. von Mises based his entire system of economics on the premise that individual choice was the key to understanding the entire range of human action.

Hillsdale College has one of the most thoroughly Misesian economics departments in the country. Most of its professors have been greatly influenced by Professor Mises and have studied under him or his students.

Dr. von Mises reciprocated this admiration by specifying that Hillsdale College receive his personal library, containing more than 5,000 volumes. The collection is now housed in a special room in the Hillsdale College library, where it will prove to be a rich resource for the students of the college and all those who wish to learn more about this giant of our age and his determined and scholarly defense of the free society.