

process in order to feel a sense of belonging to society.

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- ***Not a Conspiracy Theory: How Business Propaganda Hijacks Democracy.*** Donald Gutstein. Toronto, ON: Key Porter, 2009. 376 pp. \$22.95 pbk.

Canada has historically been a liberal country with a liberal media. From 1963 to 2005, Liberal governments held power federally about three-quarters of the time. In 2006, however, a dozen years of Liberal rule ended with the election of a minority Conservative government led by Stephen Harper, which was returned with increased support after a snap election two years later.

Then, for the first time in recent memory, the 2008 election of Barack Obama saw the United States with a more liberal administration than Canada. Much of the explanation for this anomaly can be found in a recent rightward shift in Canada's news media, the background for which is illuminated by Donald Gutstein's *Not a Conspiracy Theory: How Business Propaganda Hijacks Democracy*.

Gutstein, an emeritus faculty member in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University, builds on the ideas of the late Australian sociologist Alex Carey. In his 1995 book, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, Carey distinguished between "grassroots" propaganda, such as is occasionally required to mobilize public opinion in support of war, and "treetops" propaganda, which is instead aimed at elites, such as media, that are better able to directly influence the policy agenda. Carey pointed to the rise of U.S. think tanks, such as the Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institute, starting in the mid-1970s. Backed by enormous corporate funding, they have published vast

amounts of research promoting small government and free-market solutions to most economic and social problems. Greatly influential in the revival of U.S. conservatism in the 1980s under Ronald Reagan, their model was adopted by Canadians intent on replicating that success. As Canadian media ownership is even more highly concentrated than in the United States, the ascendance of right-wing solutions was comparatively easy to achieve in Canada.

Gutstein chronicles the successful campaign to "unite the right" in Canada when the Conservative Party was reduced to just two seats in Parliament following the 1993 federal election after the party fractured along East-West lines. Conservatives in Western Canada formed the breakaway Reform party to push a deregulatory agenda that sought, among other things, tax cuts, economic integration with the United States, and even the dismantling of Canada's socialized health care system. Backed by well-heeled foundations such as the Donner Canadian Foundation, sympathetic journalists collaborated in this cause by helping to found neoconservative magazines designed to emulate Irving Kristol's influential *Weekly Standard*.

Indeed, Harper himself even resigned his seat as a Reform Party Member of Parliament in 1997 to head the National Citizens Coalition, a tax-cutting advocacy group, and to edit the short-lived magazine *Next City*. By far, the biggest media boost to Canadian conservatism, however, came in 1996, when Conrad Black, one of the world's leading newspaper owners and neoconservatives, completed a hostile takeover of the country's largest newspaper chain, Southam Inc., which had been traditionally liberal.

Black used Southam's nationwide resources to found the *National Post* newspaper, which openly campaigned to "Unite the Right," as the front-page banner headline on its first issue declared in

1998. Its pages were filled with favorable reports on research done by Canadian think tanks such as the C.D. Howe Institute and the Fraser Institute, which called for such measures as deficit reduction and privatization. Black renounced his Canadian citizenship in 2000 to take a seat in the British House of Lords, and under Canada's foreign ownership regulations he was forced to divest his media holdings there. He sold the *National Post* and Southam's stable of other influential dailies to television network Canwest Global Communications. Its owning Asper family took Black's imposition of editorial ideology to another level before losing control of the company amid bankruptcy proceedings brought by the recent recession. (See a review of *Asper Nation: Canada's Most Dangerous Media Company* by Mark Edge, in the Winter 2008 issue of JMCQ.) The Aspers fared better than Black, who in 2007 was sentenced to six-and-a-half years in a Florida prison for fraud and obstruction of justice committed while selling off his newspaper empire.

Much of the research produced by right-wing think tanks in Canada has been ideologically driven and based on questionable data, as Gutstein shows. A former investigative journalist, he rolls up his sleeves to reveal the glaring conflicts of interest and blatant hypocrisy inherent in think tank research on such topics as fish farming and climate change. He makes great use of the vast online repository of documents archived as part of the \$200-billion legal settlement agreed to by tobacco companies in 1998 (<http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/>). These archives show that the Fraser Institute, in particular, marketed itself to Big Tobacco as willing to provide research that downplayed the dangers of second-hand cigarette smoke—for a price.

Not a Conspiracy Theory helps to connect the dots between Canada's media and the propagandists who have enjoyed spectacular success in changing the country's political course. Gutstein does an

admirable job of chronicling the players and publications in this startling ideological transformation. As a case study, it has wider application as a cautionary tale for other countries of the power of business-backed propaganda. The only glaring weakness of *Not a Conspiracy Theory* is its lack of an index to help the reader keep track of the multitudinous institutes, foundations, and operatives involved. If awareness is indeed the antidote for propaganda, Gutstein has gone a long way toward pulling back the curtain to expose the machinations behind Canada's recent rightward shift.

MARC EDGE

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■ ***The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns.*** D. Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G. Shields. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 249 pp. \$22.95 pbk.

This is a book that political junkies and "quantoids" will definitely appreciate. Unfortunately, because it discusses the media in too few places, I cannot recommend it for a media and politics or similar course.

Nevertheless, Hillygus and Shields—political science professors at Duke University and the University of Arkansas, respectively—have written an information-packed book that anyone interested in the political process—especially as it relates to voting—ought to read. They examine how America's two leading political parties have used wedge issues (i.e., abortion and stem-cell research, among others) to pull wavering voters into their camps. The authors define a "wedge issue" as "any policy concern that is used to divide the opposition's winning coalition."

They suggest that emphasizing wedge issues has worked in political campaigns because some of the most persuad-

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