

ADDRESSING THE “THEORETICAL BLIGHT:” HOW ROBERT A. BRADY SHAPED POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNICATION

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*In his foreword to Robert A. Brady's canonical text, *Business as a System of Power* (1943), Brady's colleague, Robert Lynd, questions—“will democratic political power absorb and use economic resources, bigness and all, to serve its ends, or will big economic power take over state power?” This far-fetched proposition guided Brady's projects and inspired a new class of critical political economics, many of whom applied their analyses to the field of communication. Brady's expansive contributions to the field of communication are perhaps best understood through the context in which he conducted research and his web of influence in the academy. Brady's musings reveal forgotten—or ostensibly omitted—revelations about how businesses wield power over social, technological, political, and cultural transformations. This investigation traces how Robert A. Brady's social and political history, fiercely democratic ideology, and scathing critique of business and state coordination prove significant to the history of political economy of communication.*

KEYWORDS Communication history, political economy of communication, Cold War, anti-fascism

Foundational Influence on Political Economy of Communication

The political economy of communication (PEC) project is thought to have begun in the early 1950s, with canonical thinkers like Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller connecting radical political economic theory to the increasingly consolidated North American communication apparatus (Schiller 1999; Wasko, Murdock, and Sousa 2011; Lent 1995). Early PEC concerns stemmed from a decrease in regulatory action and the simultaneous increase in corporate capture by American media firms. From the get-go, PEC was more than a mere academic endeavour, it was and remains a praxis-oriented political project. As Vincent Mosco describes, “the point of explaining the world is to change it ... critical [communication] researchers have been most interested in advancing ... the fullest possible public participation in the decisions that affect our lives” (Mosco 1995, p. 174). A defining element of PEC scholarship is its focus on historical transformation; the subfield is characterized by a concern for the relations between capital and culture on the one hand, and the interconnected web of structural coordination, on the other (Schiller 1999). The field's *de factor*

‘founders,’ Smythe and Schiller, incorporated both levels of analysis into their work. While a radical PEC tradition didn’t concretize until the mid-twentieth century, the field of political economy had long concerned itself with issues of business power. Beyond the now infantilized Karl Marx, many well-known theorists informed today’s PEC tradition, including Thorstein Veblen, J.M. Clark, Wesley Clair Mitchell, Max Weber, and even sociologists like Robert S. Lynd. It is from this lineage that the early twentieth century political economist, Robert A. Brady entered the field.

Robert A. Brady was regarded as a populist radical among pre-war political economists. After completing his PhD in economics at Columbia University in 1929, Brady joined the faculty at University of California Berkeley. Known as a hotbed of dissension, Brady became good friends with J. Robert Oppenheimer and others working on the Manhattan Project during his time in the San Francisco Bay Area. His social associations and political activism made Brady a target of the second Red Scare.¹ At the time, the U.S. government labelled suspected communists as, “pre-mature anti-fascists,” a term derived from the Spanish Civil War, describing the American volunteer force known as the ‘Lincoln Brigade’ who fought for XV International Brigade (spearheaded by Communist International) against General Francisco Franco’s rebellion. Overtime, the term has taken on a life of its own, and despite claims that it was never actually used as a derogatory claim by the FBI or other government agencies, it is colloquially used to describe suspected communists from the second red-scare, such as Brady (Haynes and Klehr 2002; Schrecker 1994). Smythe, a student of Brady’s, was likewise a target of the same government crusade against New Deal ‘liberals,’ and for him it “really confirmed in me a radical position.” It seems that in attempting to quell internal dissent within National Recovery Administration (NRA) agencies, the Dies Committee and House Committee to investigate Un-American Activities (HUAC) instead added more fuel to the fire. While Smythe enjoyed a long career in academia once his time in Washington ended, Brady’s reputation grew increasingly tainted by inflammatory hearsay from HUAC politicians and rhetoric published in the popular press. It was these influences that ultimately contributed to Brady’s pre-mature death at the age of 62.

Despite his untimely demise, Brady’s legacy has brilliantly endured through his students’ work. Smythe worked closely with Brady as a graduate student at the University of California Berkeley, referencing Brady, among few counterparts, in the acknowledgements to what Schiller describes as Smythe’s “landmark monograph” from 1957. Smythe notes “to [Brady] I owe acknowledgement for his share in the discussions which started me on the writing of the present work” (1999, 97; Smythe 1957, 5). In later works, Smythe describes a series of correspondences between he and Brady—pertaining to their coinciding research on telecommunications structure in the mid-1950s. “Coordinate Unification of Multiple Function Networks” in the emerging telecommunications market was particularly concerning to Brady; the problems relating to this phenomenon pertained, as he puts it, to the “expansion and interlacing of the wire and cable webs, planning use of the radio spectrum, functional interlacing, and problems of regional interlacing” (Brady 1946). Brady expands on these ideas in his book *Organization, Automation, and Society* (1961), in *Planning and Technology* (1950), and in a draft outline for “The Science and Art of Planning,” which Brady unsuccessfully sought support for in 1946, but was “refused” (Brady 1946; Carnegie Corporation of New York 1947). Although disparate in scope, Smythe’s 1957 book, *The Structure and Policy of Electronic Communication*, “nonetheless incorporated one of Brady’s foremost theoretical emphases into its governing framework” (Schiller 1999, 98).

As Schiller highlights, Smythe’s early work mirrored what Brady viewed as the “magnum opus,” of his own research (Brady 1946, 3). In a 1947 proposal to the Carnegie Commission of New York for an undeveloped project on “The Science and Art of Planning,”

Brady writes—“any attempt to reexamine [economic theory de novo], it seems to me, must rest its chances of success upon a view of economic theory as a part of the rest of the social sciences” (1946, 4). For Brady, the field of economics was suffering from a serious “theoretical blight” imposed by the assumption that “economics is [only] quasi-organizationally related to the subject matter of political science, sociology, history, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy” (1946, 4). The crux of Brady’s argument suggests that in its post-war state, the field of economics was uncritical and apolitical, focusing too heavily on price mechanics, national income, and full employment as determinants of income inequality (1946, 4). He states, “by reducing value theory to a set of price propositions, geometric and algebraic nicety has been achieved at the cost of explanations which can have but little meaning for the work-a-day phenomena to which they are related” (1946, 4). This “theoretical blight,” was only rectified through a shift toward inherently evaluative, interdisciplinary, and praxis-oriented economic research. Instead of assuming that income inequality, as one of the foremost issues in modern economics, was best solved through cooperation with the principles of capitalist production and consumption, Brady argued that other social determinants mechanistically contributed to the issue, and that adapting an interdisciplinary approach to political economic problems would result in progress relatable to the “work-a-day man” (1946). Brady’s political economy was a harbinger of what became the PEC tradition, and Brady’s theoretical stance further describes how his work informed PEC’s foundation.

As an early contributor to PEC, Brady’s theoretical position is unlike what some argue is “a vague, crude, and unselfquestioning form of Marxism” (Garnham 2011, 42). In fact, Brady’s argument against economics’ purely quantitative orientation is neither Marxist, nor lacking empiricism. As economist and student of Brady’s Douglas Dowd describes, “both Veblen and Brady were well acquainted with and friendly critics of the corpus of Marxism; but neither Marxian accumulation theory nor its implications were incorporated into their own analyses” (Dowd 1994, 1033). Brady was anticapitalist, yet his work focuses on the anti-democratic tendencies associated with the socioeconomic power of business rather than on capital accumulation. So, while Brady’s ideological position aligned closely with his successors, Dallas Smythe, Herbert Schiller, and Edward Herman who viewed media content and structure as central to capitalist reproduction, Brady was more concerned with how structural coordination in media and other industries contributed to the rise of fascism. For Brady, the instrumentalization of the ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ through planned coordination between business and the state was the ultimate threat to democratic governance. Having lived through second world war and studied the organisational tendencies of the Third Reich firsthand (see *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism*, 1937), Brady rejected purely statistical industry analyses, for under fascism, economic success is instrumentalized despite its negative social and cultural externalities. Brady’s work critiques the structure and logic of business under democratic governance, actively resisting the perceived downfalls of normative post-war economic research.

Smythe was not alone in modernizing many of Brady’s theoretical propositions; Edward S. Herman, former professor of finance at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, and co-author (alongside Noam Chomsky) of the acclaimed, *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), is thought to have worked with Brady while doing his PhD at University of California Berkeley (Pickard and Wolfson 2018). While the economist Douglas Dowd, a fellow student of Brady’s and colleague of many political economists of communication, remarked that “the department was at its peak of excellence” while he and Herman were graduate students, Brady’s personal writings depict a more jaded environment. In reflecting on the

department's response to Brady's attempted suicide in 1953, he expressed astonishment at his colleagues' kindness, "despite the fact that I have some real enemies there" he says (Dowd 1996; Brady 1953, 2). But, as Dowd describes, what truly separated he and Herman's education from present-day curricula in advanced economics is diversity of faculty scholarship; "of the thirty or so members at least six could be classified as social critics, dissenters, or radicals, and another half dozen or so were reasonably sane about the economy" (1996, 55). To complete their graduate degrees, Herman and Dowd "had to study for and pass written and oral exams in economic history and the history of economic thought, an understanding of which made one very sceptical indeed concerning the matter of the other field required, economic theory" (1996, 55). The acknowledgement, if not tacit acceptance of critical economic scholarship, was eliminated by the U.S. government's crusade against radicalism under the second Red Scare.² This targeted attack against critical thought forced scholars like Brady into exile. At UC Berkeley, which was a refuge for many denounced WWII intellectuals fleeing persecution in war-ridden countries, faculty were required to sign a loyalty oath in 1950, swearing "they were not members of the communist party" (Stewart 1950; Lipset 1953; Jackson 2009, 42). This defining moment had widespread consequences on how future intellectuals—in the field of economics, but also the social sciences more broadly—were taught, and ultimately how they would eventually teach. On a curricular level, Dowd (1996, 55) asserts that unlike he and Herman's experience, "nowadays all one must 'master' is one aspect or another of that mindless, heartless, foolish [economic] theory (plus math)." Brady was by no means the only post-war intellectual to inspire students in the field of political economy, but through his remarkable network one surmises the profound relevance his approaches had—and continue to have—on political economic critiques of communication. This investigation recovers Brady's neverbeforeseen correspondence and research, placing this foundational thinker as central to the PEC tradition while demonstrating his works' longstanding relevance.

Archival Evidence of Institutional Pressure

Research Questions and Methodology

This investigation is derived from two forms of historical methodology; first, I 'burrow down' in conversations with and about Brady in historical newspaper articles and digitally accessible congressional reports, 'listening in' to how he's characterized (Corrigan 2018).³ Second, I conducted a close reading of Brady's primary text and visited an array of archival collections and digital repositories. My research sites included the Carnegie Corporation's collection at Columbia University, the Robert S. and Helen Merrill Lynd's papers at the Library of Congress, digitized HUAC proceedings from the mid-1940s (accessed through Hathi Trust), and historic newspaper articles from sources across the United States (accessed through ProQuest Historic Newspapers). I likewise consulted other scholars in the field of communication who have conducted research on Brady, including Dr. Dan Schiller. Through conversations with Schiller, I was able to narrow my investigative path to avoid repetition and focus on untapped leads.

My research into Brady is driven by a few guiding questions—How does the broader context of Robert A. Brady's intellectual lineage contribute to the study and conceptualization of the state, industry, and individuals in post-war political economic research? What were Robert A. Brady's central arguments about the post-war industrialization of the American economy and what relevance does this offer communication and related fields?

Historic Newspapers and Congressional Reports

When beginning my search for historic newspaper articles, I used context clues gleaned from the secondary literature on Brady to determine the initial search terms. Douglas Dowd and Dan Schillers' writings, alongside Brady's daughter Joan's autobiography, *The Unmaking of a Dancer: An Unconventional Life* (1982), inspired my first set of search terms. The process was iterative; as I collected more material, I intuited more nuanced clues and narrowed my search accordingly.

Using the *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* database, I cast a wide search on Robert A. Brady, using Boolean operators to add terms related to Brady's work, or his public characterisation. My list of terms was expansive and iterative, including words and phrases like "communist," "fascist," "Germany," "Professor," "Dr.," "economics," "OPA," "NRA," "Berkeley," "California," etc. Additionally, I limited the date range depending on the specific operators. For example, when searching for information related to Brady's work at the Office of Price Administration, I limited the date range to only include articles published between 1941 and 1944. Besides using context clues and Boolean operators to ensure the newspaper articles were about Brady, I also added geographic boundaries depending on the intent of the search. When seeking articles related to Brady's role in the UC Berkeley Loyalty Oath debacle, for instance, I limited the search to articles written in California and later exclusively San Francisco, CA. By tactfully using search modifiers, I could more easily weed out unrelated results and yield more applicable findings. Through this process, I gained valuable insight into the stages of Brady's career and learned how social and political institutions sought to discredit his work. In total, I collected upwards of thirty newspaper articles, ranging in publication date from 1938–1956 which each contributed to my understanding of Brady's intellectual career and the challenges he faced along the way.

Collecting congressional records pertaining to Brady presented a greater challenge. After amassing a collection of historical newspaper articles, I sketched out a list of government organisations and committees that Brady may have been involved with. This included the Office of Price Administration under the National Recovery Administration, the Dies Committee, and more. Using my university's library database and the Library of Congress website, I used Boolean operators and key word searches to collect documents that referenced Brady. Accumulating government documents related to Brady's time with the U.S. government and the investigations into his perceived communist activities lend credibility to the conclusion that Brady was red baited for his political alignment and activities. This narrative is further bolstered by primary source materials found in an array of archives.

Archival Materials and Primary Texts

I conducted a close reading of Brady's books and articles to inform the pedagogical contributions to this investigation, including *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* (1937), *Business as a System of Power* (1943), *Planning and Technology* (1950), and *Organization, Automation, and Society* (1961), and articles like "The Fascist Threat to Democracy" (1938). I read the forewords to Brady's monographs, simultaneously investigating the central figures in and around Brady during his graduate career and beyond. Dowd's thoughtful reflection on Brady's career suggested that many of his role models were not unfriendly to Marxism, but believed it insufficient, notably Thorstein Veblen, a foundational political economist who was a close friend and colleague of Brady's until his death in 1929, and the economist Wesley Clair Mitchell, to whom Brady dedicates his most influential book, *Business as a System of Power* (1943) (Dowd 1994, 1033). I used these connections as

a starting point, building a list of figures whose archival materials might contain correspondence with Brady.

I found an insightful lead in the foreword to Brady's first book, *Business as a System of Power* (1943) which was written by Robert S. Lynd. Lynd, a former sociologist at Columbia University, taught alongside Brady's mentor Wesley Clair Mitchell during the timeframe Brady studied at the institution (~1922–1929). While the finding aid for Mitchell's papers at Columbia indicate that none of his correspondences with Brady were preserved, Lynd's papers told a different story. After contacting the archivists at the Library of Congress about Lynd's papers, I discovered a microfilmed reel of correspondences from 1923–1994 containing a miscategorized letter from Brady to Lynd, describing the circumstances that led to Brady's 1953 suicide attempt (Brady 1953). The record demonstrates how the widespread mischaracterisation of Brady's work ultimately led to his attempted suicide in 1951; the exact impetus of this action is unknown, but Brady described the events as a consequence of being "the first time in my life that I was good and damn mad, over something that then loomed large but which I subsequently realized was small" (Brady 1953). While Brady's work wrought widespread consequences for his personal and professional life, he continued to teach, mentor, and write throughout the latter part of the 1950s until a stroke in 1961 rendered him "incapacitated, unable to speak clearly, or to use one side of his body, until his death in 1963" (Dowd 1994, 1056). Brady's signature on the letter to Lynd was signed over with the name "Bob Merton," another sociologist at Columbia University, who was likewise close with Lynd. Despite the mis categorisation in Lynd's papers, the letter is clearly written by Brady, as he references himself and his wife, Mildred Edie Brady. It's possible that this was an oversight, or likewise possible that due to the political tensions of the era, Lynd thought it prudent to avoid associations with a premature anti-fascist like Brady. Evidence of Brady's supposed subversion was likewise found in materials housed in the Carnegie Corporation's Grant Files at Columbia University, further demonstrating the personal effect these political aggressions had on Brady.

Through my close reading of Brady's monographs, I learned that *Business as a System of Power* (1943) was fully supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a philanthropic funding agency supporting educational endeavours that preserve democratic values. Funding agencies like Carnegie shape academic fields by determining what research deserves to be supported, and in turn, what (or who) does not. Brady's project on the "Study of the Problem of Bureaucracy" was funded by the Carnegie Corporation in 1934, with additional support throughout the 1940s for production costs related to the book. Brady's file in the Carnegie Corporation's collection contained numerous unpublished outlines, book proposals, and countless correspondence—mostly chronicling the production process for *Business as a System of Power* (1943).

During the review process for *Business as a System of Power* (1943), The Carnegie Corporation sent the manuscript to numerous unfriendly critics of the book— Robert T. Crane (Social Science Research Council) and Boris M. Stanfield (Columbia University). Crane described the manuscript as "a piece of thinking and not research," while Stanfield characterized the book as "an elaboration of the well-known Marxian treatment of capitalism and of Stalinist theory of Fascism" without giving heed to Marx nor Stalin (Carnegie Corporation 1941; Stanfield 1942). Although Brady's book received harsh criticism, other reviewers, Leo Wolman (Columbia University) and J. Frederic Dewhurst (Twentieth Century Fund), spoke optimistically about the manuscript. As to the 'unfriendly critics,' the Corporation believed that "both of the readers [had] an unconscious bias," against Brady, likely related to the heightened political climate of the Cold War, and the government's targeting of suspected communists and premature anti-fascists (Carnegie Corporation 1942). Carnegie paid no

mind to many of these criticisms, writing “so far as the Corporation was concerned, the question of Brady’s political views was irrelevant (...) since we had invested \$18,000 in Brady through the University of California, it was fair to assume that we would give careful consideration to publication of his work” (1942). While institutional gatekeepers like the Carnegie Corporation have significant sway over the production of scholarly research, Brady’s case shows that during the early 1940s the Carnegie Corporation appeared more driven by their return on investment, rather than the political implications of the work they supported. It wasn’t until later, during the Reece Committee’s congressional campaign against philanthropic organisations in the 1950s, that the Corporation would be forced to defend their decision to support Brady’s ‘Marxian’ scholarship.

It’s worth noting that during the review process, the Federal Bureau of Investigation—led by J. Edgar Hoover at the time—reached out to the associate director of the Carnegie Corporation about Brady. Materials from the Carnegie Corporation’s files show that the FBI agent, “said that they had pretty reliable evidence that Robert Brady had been connected with various communistic groups in California and wanted to know if [Carnegie’s] files offered any information” (Carnegie Corporation 1942). Carnegie didn’t give anything away at that time, and instead, referred the agent to Brady’s close friend and colleague, Wesley Clair Mitchell. About a decade later, these files resurfaced under the Reece Committee’s 1953 investigation into educational and philanthropic organisations use of “resources for un-American and subversive activities (...) not in the interest or tradition of the United States” (Carnegie Corporation 1953; Select Committee to Investigate Foundations 1953). Carnegie’s reference sheets describe that his file wouldn’t be intact if not for the fact that “Brady was one of the points of attack of the Reece Committee (...), its report devoting a couple of pages to this example of ‘leftist’ grants made by foundations” (1953).

Carnegie’s dedication to research throughput during the 1940s, though a sign of integrity, made it a target of the U.S.’ broader crusade against radicalism during the Cold War period. This example demonstrates that the U.S.’ Cold War offense against radical scholarship—particularly that which undermined the pervasiveness of Western capitalism—targeted scholars and the social institutions that supported them. This instance of the U.S.’ integrated approach to condemning “un-American” activities builds on existing literature that centralizes anti-capitalist sentiment toward media and other social institutions as a dominant threat to the so-called ‘American way of life’ (Lent 1995; Schiller 1996; Pickard 2015; Pickard 2016; Stabile 2018; Stabile et. al. 2025). The following sections elucidate Brady’s most pertinent contributions to the field of political economy, highlighting how these reflections relate to overarching trends in the structure and critique of mass communications and related industries.

Coordination of Business and State Interests: The Structural Threat to Democracy

Brady built on numerous key trends over the course of his career; decidedly influenced by the political turmoil of the immediate post-war period and extensive field research in Europe, Brady’s work highlights how the coordination of business and state interests pose a structural threat to democratic governance. He claims that “[b]usinessmen all over the world are engaged in weaving parallel webs of control. As the separate strands extend, a point is reached at which, willy-nilly, a choice of direction is forced upon the businessman. [The totalitarian road] leads to the shaking off of all popular restraints on such cumulative powers and to shaping the contours and determining the content of economic policies pregnant with far-reaching political, social and cultural implications” (Brady 1943, 4). What Brady claims as

the “contrasting choice” of the liberal capitalistic system shifts the growth of democratic institutions from state powers to private industry, “steadily widening the latitude for direct political participation in the formulation of economic policies affecting public interests” (1943, 4). To disentangle relevant geopolitical case studies, Brady undertook field work in Germany, France, England, and Italy, alongside an analysis of the United States’ position. In these works, Brady used notably distinct methods from his colleagues in mainstream economics, who under a ‘blighted’ perspective, resorted to purely statistical analyses without incorporating the sociological, political, or historical relations embedded in economic reality.

Brady’s studies are comprehensive and focus on political economic phenomena under disparate political apparatuses, industries, and cultures. Through an iterative process, Brady illustrates that patterns of coordination transcend levels of government oversight; that “integration, coordination, planning, these are the very root and marrow, the essence and spirit of the industrial system” (Brady 1943, 1). Arguments like Brady’s differed, both ideologically and epistemologically, from conventional norms in economics during the early post-war period. Perhaps the most telling criticisms of Brady were waged against his book, *Business as a System of Power* (1943), which includes his most lucid analysis of business and state coordination. Post-war economists of a more ‘conventional’ stature critiqued Brady as “an ardent left-wing socialist ... at some pains to paint the capitalist world in dark colours” (Guillebaud, 1945, 95). Other commentaries of *Business* (1943) point to Brady’s integration of concepts from political science for the “half-truths” and “aggrandized” statements he supposedly makes (Means 1943, 166). Reviewers likewise used passive language to rebuke Brady’s primary thesis that the coordination of business and state power leads to fascism, “[*Business*] presents the ... modern Marxist thesis of the nature of fascism that has yet appeared (...) Professor Brady is a socialist with admiration for the Soviet solution” (Bingham 1943, 1081–1082). Here, reviewers of *Business* (1943) strived to discredit Brady’s work on ideological and methodological grounds. Reviewers use ad hominem attacks to distinguish Brady from fellow post-war political economists by claiming an alliance with the Soviet position—which drastically differs from his own espoused position as a radical scholar activist. Rhetoric by Brady’s counterparts shows the stigma associated with heterodox economic thinking in the immediate post-war period, foreshadowing the public red-baiting Brady would continue experiencing through the early 1960s.

Contrary to widespread criticism, Brady’s scholarship was innately historical, tracing economic trends sociologically across time. The concept of ‘coordination’ that Brady (1943) describes is similar to the concept of ‘conglomeration’ that political economists frequently use to describe the integration of smaller business units into larger, more powerful entities. ‘Cartels’ are formed through inter-industry coordination, resulting in market contraction by limiting competition and ceding authority to firms—or groups of firms—with the greatest market power. If unchecked by regulators, inter-industry coordination, consolidation, and conglomeration allow for the formation cartels, and from there, monopolies. The overarching effect of monopolization in industry is decreased consumer choice and increased producer power. Brady emphasizes that when business and state interests are coordinated, similar outcomes persist, only state leadership wields control over citizens rather than producers leveraging authority over consumers. Brady’s research demonstrates that totalitarianism occurs when the public interest is seized by business cartels and monopolies which leverage their role for greater government influence. Schiller characterizes this central theme as emblematic of Brady’s resonance in the field of political economy, drawing parallels between adjacent studies from the inter-war period of media firms’ attempts to “manipulate ‘the public mind’ (...) [and discern] in the apparatus of contemporary advertising ‘machinery of super government’” (Schiller 1999, 93).

Brady’s contested reputation in political economy never stopped him from fighting for a more egalitarian economy, nor did it quell his fears for the future of democratic society. The logics of structural coordination between industry and government, he argues, are intertwined with the tenets of technological innovation and long-term planning. In fact, these economic phenomena *precipitate* the tendency toward business and state coordination; Brady describes that the logics of technological innovation and long-term planning under capitalist economic systems give rise to the assumption that “capitalism and democracy are two aspects of the same thing, as that the progress manifestly occurring in industry must also be happening in the democratic political system” (Lynd in foreword to Brady 1943, ix). The following sections consider how normative economic assumptions conflate technological innovation and long-term planning with democratic strength, when, as Brady points out, history reveals the opposite effect.

Technology as a Means for Social Control

“The dynamism of [technology] is equally traceable to powerful stimuli coming from [science]. They interact and react upon each other in an infinity of ways” (Brady 1961, x). The supposed interconnectedness of science and technology that Brady identifies in *Organization, Automation, and Society* (1961) is evidence of how Cold War tensions fuelled ideological competition between contrasting theories of “centralization and decentralization” in the post-war period (1961, vii). Although both theories of economic planning dominated the mid twentieth century, both likewise wrought immense technological development. Brady writes—

As far as our evidence goes, to take the extreme case, it now seems clear that Soviet science in most fields is essentially like our own. In nearly all fields it is at grips with essentially the same fundamental problems; employs the same methodologies and techniques; combines postulations, deductive reasoning, and empirical verification in substantially the same ways; draws upon our research, our publications, and our discoveries and speculations as we in turn are learning to draw upon theirs (Brady 1961, viii).

Just as science and technology build upon and act on each other, so do the societies that engage with them. The difference, however, between science and technology and centralized versus decentralized economic planning, is the volatile and complex ‘social factor,’ which governs both duologies. This ‘social factor’ is latent in all issues related to economic, social, and cultural organisation. In building on his critique of normative economics’ limited scope, which frames “income distribution ... as only a problem of price mechanics, on the one hand, and national income and full employment on the other,” Brady demonstrates that the field’s “theoretical blight” restricts the degree to which the economic imperatives driving technological progress adequately solve political, social, and cultural problems (Brady 1946, 3–4). Ultimately, the success of what Brady calls the “scientific revolution in industry,” hinges on industry’s ability to incorporate the ‘social factor’ (1946).

The “vast and meticulously spun networks of communications” exemplify what Brady sees as a “macrocosm” of the scientific revolution in industry (1961, 361–362). Just as automation transformed industrial manufacturing, wire lines introduced the expeditious “interchange of information and ideas” (1961, 362). Brady cites coordination in the early telegraph and telephone industries as representative of an emerging “nerve system” for the new industrial world (1961). Like other early critiques of telecommunication control,

Brady identifies four principles that ruled market expansion—"universal interconnection; automatic operation; multiple function and multiple use; and media integration." Smythe waged similar arguments against consolidation in the telecommunications market, and it's thought that Smythe suggested the pair co-write on the topic. Schiller quotes Smythe as saying "I then proposed a joint book in which I would deal with the standardization movement in telecommunications and [Brady] with other areas of the industry. He suggested that we write our pieces independently" (Smythe in Schiller 1999, 97). As described earlier, the scholars were close, and Brady credits Smythe for his assistance in enhancing his work on telecommunications in the preface to *Organization, Automation, and Society* (1961). Brady's explication of coordination strategies in the early telecommunications market is distinct from more modern critical political economic arguments. Instead of viewing coordination as exclusively economic, Brady explores the anti-democratic implications of non-economic coordination in the early telecommunications market.

Brady describes how "all levels of development are in ... continuous contact," between telecommunication technologies across the industry; the level of 'universal interconnection,' between international telecommunications companies is "as though they were being operated by a single company" (1961, 364). Brady argues that most countries' telecommunications networks are centrally run by national units that organize communication forms (i.e., postal, radio, broadcasting) "so that they operate as a single unified world communications system" (1961, 365). Here, Brady builds on his central argument of coordination between business and state interests, incorporating technological development as an instrument for influence. Automation within telecommunications technology likewise presents a level of coordination; Brady aptly identified "the use of feedback amplifiers for maintaining the strength of signals ... and automatic dialling and switching system," as two early examples of automation in the market (1961, 367). Feedback amplifiers exponentially increased the number and reach of global telephone channels, while microwave radio relay systems used similar automation techniques to increase broadband channels. Further, "manual dialling, coupled with automatic switching [made] it theoretically possible instantaneously to connect any two points within the system" (1961, 367). Brady accurately predicted that this "self-programming" would result in "universal and virtually instantaneous automatic interconnection among all individuals and all parts of the world" (1961, 368). For Brady, the use of automation for instantaneous interconnection in the early telecommunication industry served as a prime example of how technology becomes a tool for widespread influence when coopted by private industry at the helm of the state.

In his earlier book, *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* (1937), Brady aptly demonstrates the contradictions between the organisation of media business and the messages they disseminate. Brady writes, "[business-state units] are merely promoting what they see, via the profit and loss account, to be 'sound thought' and 'sound art.' If this means it will pay to do so, they will keep the symbols of 'liberty,' 'democracy,' of 'freedom,' and of representative government, however much these may be emasculated in fact" (1937, 83). Under a capitalist economic structure in which media business is subservient to state regulation, an entity is beholden to two interests—profit and authorization. When the technical infrastructure used by media business to disseminate information and ideas is coopted by cartels of 'élite' businessman and government officials, the entire media enterprise becomes a tool for propaganda. For Brady, technological unification in the telecommunication market served as the manifestation of a coordinated attempt to control hearts and minds.

While today the dominant media modalities have shifted, the principles of coordination continue to constrict the market, limiting new entrants and consolidating power

among a few major firms. During Brady’s lifetime, unification crystallized a highly integrated, consolidated, and innovation driven communications industry, which persists today. Early telecommunications planning, motivated by ideologies of capitalistic de-centralization, contributed to the U.S.’ global dominance in the communications industry. Brady’s focus on the social, political, and cultural consequences of business coordination distinguishes his contributions from mere mathematical economic analyses; however, Brady’s critical lens likewise made him a target. Conventional economists were dissuaded by Brady’s disposition because of how punitive anti-communism in the post-war period was. The process of economic planning, coupled with technological innovation under a decentralized market leads to one of Brady’s central imaginaries for the future of political economic governance—“how to use techniques so that they will nourish, not destroy, the good life” (Brady 1950, 1). Telecommunications unification offers merely one example of the cumulative effect made by the post-war feud over centralized versus decentralized economic planning. In full, the principles of coordination, technological innovation and decentralized economic planning worked in tandem to facilitate Western domination of media and communication industries.

The Imperialist Appeal of Economic Planning

While Brady never worked directly with Herbert Schiller, he’s thought to have had an indirect influence on his work (Schiller 1999). In *Mass Communication and American Empire* (1969), Schiller waged a political economic critique against the “structure and policy of mass communications in the United States ... questioning the relevance of the policies of American institutions to the grave dangers which beset the country, and the world” (Smythe in Schiller 1969, x). Schiller’s book (1969) was written during the Cold War period and was heavily influenced by geopolitical tensions—namely the triadic power of the United States, Soviet Union, and outlying states. The crux of the hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union, as Brady points out, was the ideological contradiction between their respective forms of economic planning.

In essence, economic planning is “science applied to cooperative organization of means on behalf of socially acceptable ends” (Brady 1950, 2). Said differently, economic planning is the process by which state actors organize resources to achieve civically determined goals. Brady describes that economic planning was one of multiple factors differentiating the Soviet Union and United States—or democratic capitalist and totalitarian socialist countries—during the Cold War (1961). Brady states, “one champions (in theory at least) the highly decentralized American “free enterprise” system. The other promotes the highly centralized, “omnipresent,” and “omnicompetent” planning mechanism associated with the U.S.S.R. (where, however, there is a trend toward decentralization)” (1961, vii).

This distinction is clear on a cursory level; however, Brady demonstrates how the combination of business coordination and state planning generates similar outcomes under both planning models, despite opposite governing ideologies. Under a totalitarian socialist structure, state control over the organisation of resources leads to less direct civic participation in the organisation of resources. Conversely, under a capitalist democratic structure, less government control over the organisation of resources should offer greater civic participation in the organisation of resources. Realistically, decentralized and centralized systems both cede reciprocal authority to business units, which act on and are influenced by state interests. Lynd queried in his foreword to Brady’s *Business*, “will democratic political power absorb and use economic resources, bigness and all, to serve its ends, or will big economic power take over state power?” (Lynd in Foreword to Brady 1943, xiii). Brady’s research shows that long-term economic planning, combined with the coordination of business and state

interests, results in a tendency toward authoritarian imperialism regardless of a state's political ideology.

Early radio spectrum planning during the 1950s and 60s illustrated the national and international scope of economic planning—and how this research influenced Herbert Schiller, whose work focused on the relationship between global control of communications technology and America's pursuit of ideological influence in the developing world. Three concurrent issues indicated the need for increased planning of the radio spectrum—a) the limited total number and type of simultaneous radio spectrum use, b) the fact that “administrative and political considerations, theories of economics, and inflexibility of statutes, rather than engineering factors, govern the allocation ...” and c) “the demand for radio service has always outgrown the useful spectrum space very soon after the technical means for using a given frequency range were known” (Brady 1961, 370). Brady describes that on their own, each of these issues necessitate planning, but “taken in combination ... the need for such programming is overwhelming and inescapable” (1961, 371).

During this period, the allocation of radio spectrum was disparate, with more powerful countries commanding a greater number and higher quality channels, while “for underdeveloped countries the problem is largely one of latecomers at a feast; the bulk of the good long-distance channels have already been pre-empted” (Brady 1961, 374). This conundrum, alongside the broader geopolitical tension of the Cold War, demonstrated the need for large scale economic planning—Brady claims that conversations about these issues needed to “take place at the very top level of global allocation, precisely where the most numerous and complex conflicts of interest render any type of planning the most difficult” (1961, 373–374). In the U.S., economic planning of the radio spectrum was (and continues to be) overseen by the FCC, which greatly favoured “technical integration of the wire and cable systems ... and in some instances corporate consolidations of competing networks” (1961, 376). The FCC was likewise responsible for “negotiating authority in the making of all international agreements affecting American communications services” (1961, 376). This begs the question, if the U.S. favoured coordination between business and state interests domestically, would this underlying sentiment translate to international agreements on radio spectrum use? Brady speculates on this question at the end of his discussion, saying “under the aegis of the FCC, technical unification of communications networks is advancing along lines that are scarcely distinguishable from those usual abroad where the state owns and operates all common-carrier and broadcasting networks” (1961, 377).

Lurking alongside Brady's critique of unification, coordination, and comparative economic planning is a clear rejection of mainstream economics' tendency toward logical positivism, a defining feature of what Brady would consider 'blighted' theory. Brady writes—

[Logical positivism] holds that economics is, or at least should be, developed as are physics, chemistry, and mathematics, on the assumption that basic data with respect to human nature and fundamental relations in society do not change. Its premises, propositions, inferences, conclusions, and laws would then not be subject to historical change. Accordingly, whatever the impact on society of the new industrial revolution, to logical positivists it would not change either fundamental data or underlying law. (Brady 1961, 19)

This type of 'temporal universality' is meaningless when working with social scientific 'data,' as unlike other quantitative disciplines, Brady argues that economics necessarily *is* or *should be* purpose oriented. For Brady, even when economic variables are quantifiable (by way of price and cost, for example), the factors contributing to global economics are

in “perpetual, irregular, and highly discontinuous (yet also cumulative) change,” rendering most quantified findings obsolete by the time they’re accurately calculated (1961, 20). Here, Brady’s critique holds that standards and norms in the field of economics fail to adequately incorporate unquantifiable social factors which for him, generate more actionable analyses. This notion of economics’ “theoretical blight,” is a constant in Brady’s research—beginning in his work during the late 1930s and continuing through his final publication, *Organization, Automation, and Society* (1961). For Brady, political economic research was never meant to remain siloed in the ivory tower of academia—as his disciple Doug Dowd aptly notes, “one was led to understand that to be thus involved was a privilege and therefore a responsibility: game players apply elsewhere” (Dowd 1994, 1034).

Many scholars have since continued assessing the global effect of the U.S.’ scientific and technological domination in industry with Douglas Dowd continuing Brady’s work in economics, and Smythe, Herman, and Schiller doing so in communication. The PEC field, occupied by Smythe, Herman, and Schiller, prioritizes Brady’s historicized theoretical framework and praxis-oriented scholarship. Brady passed away in 1963, shortly after *Organization, Automation, and Society* (1961) was published. Nonetheless, Schiller continued Brady’s final work in *Mass Communication and American Empire* (1969). Although never explicitly stated, Schiller was presumptively influenced by Brady and Smythe’s staunchly social, political economic orientation. Among other topics, *Mass Communication and American Empire* (1969) traces what Brady would consider ‘unification,’ ‘integration,’ and ‘planning’ in the U.S.’ communication apparatus, and into the developing world, emphasizing how imperialism and dependency were actualized under the guise of foreign assistance. Just as Brady attempted to “[go] beyond Veblen,” so did Brady’s successors in communication, who applied Brady’s core arguments to the burgeoning field of communication (Dowd 1994, 1031).

Conclusion

Robert A. Brady was a man whose reputation transcended his lifetime; he was known as “an intensely political person ... his politics were upfront; but most of his work came as close to what is normally meant by “scientific” as one is likely to find in social analysis: he was almost religiously objective ... voraciously well informed except as a critic, he consciously distanced himself from ideological positions; but he was never neutral” (Dowd 1994, 1033–1044). Through historical research in multiple archival sites, this project investigates Robert A. Brady’s forgotten past, and the prescience of his work in the PEC field. Although an economist by trade, Brady’s work was innately interdisciplinary, incorporating concepts from across social science disciplines into his arguments. The discipline of communication had not taken a definitive form in academia by the time Brady passed away in 1963, but many of his book chapters and articles discuss issues of related importance. Pedagogically, Brady introduced three centrally interconnected concepts that would go on to inspire PEC’s founders, Dallas W. Smythe and Herbert I. Schiller. Brady believed that coordination of business and state interests gives rise to authoritarian tendencies, regardless of the governing political ideology. To catalyse this form of control, the state captures scientific minds, transforming scientific expertise into a tool for technocratic innovation, and extending this pattern abroad through long-term economic planning in pursuit of global domination.

Much of Brady’s writing centres on how the ascendance of business and state interests triggers Fascist tendencies. Brady cautions that “the history of ... monopolies, cartels, ... and of business control over the media for disseminating news and information, demonstrates how fully the businessmen understand the uses of the symbols of freedom and tolerance

for underwriting autocratic control" (Brady 1939, 81–82). If gone unchecked, Brady warned that the consolidation of business and state interests deteriorates democratic values. In 1938, Brady wrote, "there is nothing in the attitude of the industrial or public relations counsellors of giant American enterprise or its various trade associations which is at odds with the whole mood and outlook of Fascist propagandists along these lines" (1938, 162). Although America didn't fall to Fascism during Brady's lifetime, it's worth investigating how Brady's fears manifest today. Alarming vignettes characterize America's twenty-first century descent into fascism. Unification, integration, and consolidation contract consumer choice, simultaneously deepening longstanding socioeconomic divisions. Coordination between tech firms and state actors demonstrates that business interests take precedent over public interest. Further, under the auspices of expanding citizens' rights, modern American leaders are dismantling the pillars of freedom—freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of religion, and of due process. Threats against constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, particularly those which undermine media independence and civic participation, signal impending authoritarianism. These conditions will not improve without widespread commitment to the separation of state and industry and a renewed commitment to democratic governance, just as Brady agitated for.

The ideological warfare of the second red-scare need not undermine the ferocity of today's PEC tradition. The government's attempt to oust Brady exemplified his commitment to bridging theory and praxis. Yet Brady's story needs not serve as a cautionary tale; his devotion to truth and justice demonstrate the personal qualities required to transform PEC from a scholarly project into a revolutionary one. Future reflections on the origins of PEC scholarship should include Brady's foundational work, incorporating his anti-fascist scholarship into the canon.

DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

NOTES

1. Proceedings from the House of Un-American Activities Report shows that Brady was targeted as a premature antifascist due to his involvement with suspected communist front organisations, such as American Friends of the Chinese People, The American Investors Union, American League of Peace and Democracy, Black and White (left-wing political magazine, which Brady was an associate editor for), Consumers Union (Brady served as Vice President in 1939), The Motion Picture Artists Committee, and the Academic Front, among others.
2. This period describes what's colloquially referred to as "McCarthyism," after Senator Joseph McCarthy, who led the crusade against suspected communist and communist 'front' organisations during the 1940s and 1950s. This charge was wrought by Cold War tensions, heightening anxiety about potential Soviet infiltration of American governmental, social, and cultural organisations.
3. T.C. Corrigan introduces the phrase, "burrowing down and listening in" to describe how scholars in political economy of communication 'burrow down' in trade press journals and advertising, 'listening in' to the conversations and narratives contained therein. While this isn't an industry analysis, my historical techniques are informed by Corrigan's approach. Here, I 'burrow down' in conversations with and about Robert A. Brady, and 'listen in' to the way he's portrayed and how he discusses his ideologies.

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