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Manufacturing consent: an analysis of reporting on motor collective bargaining in the financial media

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Abstract

Collective bargaining is one of the contested spaces of trade union life. How it is reported in the media is of paramount importance to trade unions, such as the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and its parent federation the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). When collective bargaining happens in a globalised space the situation becomes complex as local realities are affected by what happens thousands of miles across the globe. However, as the politics of media representation are tilted against trade unions, this study investigated how the reporting in the media impacts on collective bargaining. The study argues that media organisations do not only produce news but also 'manufacture consent,' a concept developed by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988); in the way they construct social realities. Media routines and journalistic practices have a bearing on what eventually gets published in newspapers and magazines. The media selects information that prefers certain ideologies over others whilst privileging voices of the powerful over those of the marginalised in society. The media also becomes an arena where workers' associational power clashes with that of capital: trade union voices versus those of business. In South Africa working class voices are taken less seriously than elite voices especially in the financial media. To fully comprehend the issues, the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis and uses Fairclough's (1995) three dimensions model to analyse reports on collective bargaining that were published in the *Financial Mail* and *Business Day* in 2010 and 2013. Straddling the fields of media studies and industrial relations, the study uses qualitative methods that include in-depth interviews with key media, union, and employer organisations; thematic content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis for *Business Day* and *Financial Mail* stories; and the extended case method to cater for individual experiences.

(**Key words**: manufacturing consent; collective bargaining; class interests; Critical Discourse Analysis)