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CENSORSHIP AS
INTELLECTUAL
TERRORISM: WHITE
SPOTS IN BLACK
SOUTH AFRICAN
HISTORY, OR THE
WORM INSIDE THE
LIBERATION STRUGGLE

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The second C. Walter and Gerda B. Mortenson Distinguished Lecture was delivered on October 7, 1991, by Neville Edward Alexander of Cape Town, South Africa.

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Although Dr. Alexander focuses on South Africa in this lecture, his topic and concerns are applicable far beyond that country. The complex issues he discusses here are reflected in the interplay between politics and intellectual freedom everywhere.

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INTRODUCTION



On July 13, 1991, *The New York Times* reported that Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, had been assassinated. Ten days previously, Ettore Capriolo, who had translated the fateful work into Italian, had survived a similar attempt on his life. There was no doubt that both these events, so distant in space from each other, were the direct consequence of the death sentence pronounced on Rushdie for alleged blasphemy by the Ayatollah Khomeini more than two years ago. In a world where physical coercion has become a routine instrument of political strategy and tactics, these events are no longer extraordinary. And yet they have a particular poignancy since they demonstrate in the most melodramatic manner possible the direct relationship between censorship as a purported instrument of liberation on the one hand and terrorism on the other.

These events had another significance for me personally since they closed a circle that had begun more than three years earlier when I had been invited to participate in a panel discussion on the subject of shaping South African history. The panel was one of a series of gala events organised by the publishers of *The Weekly Mail*, one of the most popular alternative newspapers in South Africa at the time. The events derived their significance from the fact that they took place under conditions of intense state repression. Since I had become deeply disturbed by a phenomenon that I believed would become a cancer in our liberation struggle, I decided to address the subject of the falsification of contemporary South African history by supposedly liberal and radical social scientists in the country.

Salman Rushdie, because of his instant celebrity status resulting from the uproar that surrounded the publication of his novel, had been asked to be the guest of honour at *The Weekly Mail* Book Week, as the festival is known. To everyone's surprise, this invitation tore the entire anti-apartheid activist community in South Africa wide apart. Intimidation, including death threats, was

directed at *The Weekly Mail* staffers, allegedly by Muslim activists. A noted sociologist who was to participate on our panel withdrew under obvious duress, but the most significant confrontation took place between two of South Africa's best-known living English-writing novelists, John Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer.

The Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), which was affiliated to the (Freedom) Charterist UDF, had invited Rushdie for the occasion. However, because of the reaction among Muslim militants they felt obliged to disinvite him and thus to put pressure on *The Weekly Mail* to accept their position. This led to a polemical encounter between Gordimer (of COSAW) and Coetzee on a panel that met in Cape Town's Baxter Theatre on 2 November 1988. Coetzee charged that the organisers had caved in to the narrow-minded, totalitarian dictates of the Muslim fundamentalists and explained that in effect, this meant abdicating from the writers' right to practise their craft since fundamentalism believed that there was only ONE BOOK. All other books could be no more than glosses on the revealed TRUTH contained in that book. Gordimer countered hotly that this was not the principle at issue, that reality required a more flexible attitude. What was at stake was no less than Rushdie's life itself. It was in order not to put him at risk that COSAW reluctantly took the decision to disinvite him. Coetzee's laconic reply was that COSAW should perhaps have left the decision about coming to South Africa to the persecuted author himself.

It is perhaps not irrelevant to draw attention to the fact that the neofascists both in and outside of the South African government were openly ridiculing the contradictions inside the liberation movement that had been laid bare by this very important event. They enjoyed to the full the embarrassment of those who were constantly and acerbically attacking the all-embracing censorship of the apartheid state.

CENSORSHIP



Censorship is defined variously, but the essence is captured in the formulation of the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee adopted in 1984: the removal of material from open access by government authority (cited in Marsh 1991:1). Viewed in this sense, censorship has been written about in thousands of works in most countries of the world. South Africa is itself one of the most disgraceful examples of state censorship in the modern world (see *LIWO Factsheet on Censorship* May 1991). Its dubious distinction in this regard has been recorded regularly in many journals, among others in the pages of *Index on Censorship* and in the newsletter of the *Action Group Against Censorship*, which is published in Johannesburg, South Africa.

My focus, however, is elsewhere since I am concerned with censorship by liberation movements, i.e., by *aspirant* governing groups. Moreover, because of the particular occasion of this address, I confine myself to the printed word even though it is obviously true that "there is no way to separate the censorship of one form of expression from that of any other" (Marsh 1991:xv).

Precisely because such movements do not yet have general state power (sometimes they do in fact control parts of the national territory in liberation zones), they tend to opt for what Choldin (1989:32) calls *active* as opposed to the conventional reactive censorship. Whereas the normal *reactive* censor has to scrutinise communications in order "to intercept, suppress, or delete material harmful to his country's or organization's interests" (Webster, cited in Choldin 1989:32), the active censor "must also translate, edit, amend, and rewrite the foreign work". An interesting and instructive study of this phenomenon as it was practised in Honecker's German Democratic Republic, which confirms Professor Choldin's findings, appeared recently in the *New York Review of Books* (see Darnton 1991:42-46). If one extends Choldin's definition from the censorship of foreign works to that of domestically produced work, it will be seen that one of the most important aspects of active censorship is in

fact the deliberate omission of relevant data. This brings the act of censorship into close proximity with its almost identical twin, propaganda. And it will be important to bear this family resemblance in mind since, as we shall see, active censorship or historical falsification is usually justified in terms of warfare and emergency situations.

Undemocratic, repressive regimes generally justify censorship on grounds of morality and the maintenance of law and order, i.e., of the inequality of the status quo. They realise that it is true that knowledge is power and that books can become weapons of struggle. Rather than rely on one of the fundamental principles of democracy, i.e., to fight ideas with ideas, they resort to brutal methods of social control. In our area of focus the ultimate brutality is, of course, the actual burning of books, which, as Heinrich Heine warned at the beginning of the 19th century, is usually the precursor to the burning of people.

The ideal of all such regimes is the attainment of hegemonic control over the entire national population. This is the point of intersection between totalitarian sociology and Freudian psychology (see, e.g., Choldin 1985:2-3). Hegemony at this point is manifest in the peculiar fact of self-censorship practised by most people in such societies, an ambience that is captured in the chilling words of Oswald Spengler: "One cannot envisage a more terrible satire on freedom of thought than this: in the past one was not allowed to think freely; today one is allowed to, but no-one is capable of thinking freely anymore . . ." (quoted in Juzwenko 1988:10).

RESISTANCE TO CONTROL



For the present, however, it is essential to note that in the end, no matter how long it takes to get there, all censorship is futile. Resistance to censorship, as to other forms of social constraint, is inevitably set up by the counter-hegemonic aspirations of the oppressed people for whom, in the winged words of Friedrich Schiller, "thought alone is free" (see Choldin 1985:6). For freedom fighters, inevitably, freedom of thought and freedom of speech become indissolubly mixed with the right to read what one wants to and even prior to that, with the right to read at all. This is one of the fundamental reasons why so many liberation struggles against colonial domination and in repressive neocolonial states are associated with large-scale literacy campaigns conducted with passionate commitment by youthful activists.

It is axiomatic that people engaged in a struggle for freedom will seek to open up all the closed doors of the state to which they are opposed. A cursory glance at the political programmes of all the organisations involved in the anti-apartheid movement and in the national liberation struggle in South Africa will verify this statement. Two examples will suffice. The New Unity Movement, successor organisation to the Non-European Unity Movement founded in 1943, demands in Point 8 of its Ten-Point Programme, freedom of speech, press, meetings, and association and spells out the meaning of this demand as follows:

This means the abolition of the Internal Security Act and related laws directed specifically against the oppressed. . . . Arbitrary banning of meetings, persons, literature and other media must go.

Similarly, in Point no.6 of the Freedom Charter of the African National Congress and of other organisations in the Congress Alliance, it is postulated that "All Shall Enjoy Human Rights" and this is understood to mean that:

[t]he law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children.

SECTARIANISM AND FUNDAMENTALISM



Clearly, the empowerment of the oppressed people through, among other things, their right to enjoy these freedoms, is inherent in any liberation struggle. On the other hand, such movements, precisely because they are directed towards the conquest of power, or at the very least towards a more equitable sharing of power always move on the narrow ledge that separates the uphill commitment to democracy and the precipitous slide into sectarianism and even totalitarian fundamentalism. For, in the deceptively simple words of Robert S. Peck (1991:12), "It is relatively easy to support speech one is in sympathy with, while much harder to defend speech that strays from the beliefs of mainstream society"

In the case of the South African liberation movement, elitist, self-proclaimed vanguard groups have from time to time constituted themselves into power-seeking cliques that have tried through various forms of thought control to manipulate the masses. Their aim and the effect of their actions was to imprison their followers in a particular *Standort* and thus to narrow their angle of vision in such a way that large and significant aspects of the historical and social landscape would remain invisible to them. This effect is described very well in an enlightening article on the state of postwar historiography in Poland, largely the result of the practices of Communist Party historians:

[S]ociety's historical consciousness has inevitably been filled with artificial half-truths and often simply untruths, about the history of the

last two centuries . . . [A] great number of people have become historically confused, unable even to distinguish truth from half-truth or a conformist compilation from an honest historical monograph. Such people are easier to manipulate (Juzwenko 1988:11).

The salient feature to note in this situation is that there is no doubt that the cliques of hidden persuaders deliberately and systematically falsify the historical picture since they have ready access to all the sources that could fill in the blank spaces. The explanation given to me some years ago by the well-known editor of one of South Africa's most prestigious English-language daily newspapers that journalism is an imprecise craft is a reprehensible cop-out behind which lurks not only a liberal disregard of verifiable truth but, under the circumstances obtaining in a violently repressive apartheid state, also a reckless disregard for human life. On this occasion, I had gone as part of a delegation of oppositional activists to complain about and to correct the demonstrably false allegations made by one of the newspaper's top reporters about certain black-consciousness organisations, allegations that were calculated to fan the flames of catastrophic internecine violence in the black ghettos around Cape Town.

It is this deliberate, conscious, i.e., avoidable, and systematic prejudicial selection of data in order to falsify reality that makes active censorship into an act of intellectual terrorism. When one considers that its purpose, unlike propaganda in time of war, is not primarily to mislead the enemy but to indoctrinate and brainwash one's own followers and thus to violate their persons by deliberately crippling their perception of reality, it is abundantly obvious why I can state without fear of contradiction that such acts of censorship in a liberation movement are the prelude to unjustifiable acts of physical terror against anathematised enemies of the people. The phenomenon of double standards (Juzwenko 1988:10), where the individuals who belong to the charmed circles of such power-hungry elites say one thing in public and almost the exact opposite in private, undermines all pretence at bona fides. It is like a worm that consumes the intestines of the liberation struggle, and it augurs ill for the enjoyment of freedom after victory. What tends to happen in fact is that the revolution devours its own children.

The totalitarian tendency in national liberation movements derives from opportunistic claims on the part of nationalist populist elites to be accepted by all as the sole authentic representatives of the people. This fundamentalist doctrine of sole authenticity has given rise to countless massacres in many different countries and at many different times. The most recent (1982-90) attempt to claim authority in South Africa by groups associated with the ANC and the South African Communist Party led to frightful carnage in the townships. It became so terrifying and counterproductive that numerous attempts were made by many different individuals and groups in the broad liberation movement to put an end to the terror, the killings, shootings, necklacings, burnings, stabbings, and general mayhem. Like Goethe's sorcerer's apprentice, the often frivolous initiators of this tragic chain of events could not find the formula with which to gain control over the forces they had so foolishly unleashed. Even today, our country continues to reap the bitter fruit of such lack of vision. One of the most eloquent attacks on this short-sighted insanity, which is at the same time a convincing defence of the freedoms of speech, thought, assembly, and association, was published by the Natal region of the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA), an organisation affiliated to the New Unity Movement. Among many other important insights, it insists that those it calls the violators are:

[a] small clique of intellectuals which regards itself as the vanguard and its members as super-revolutionaries. This clique has fashioned its methods of working on those used by that discredited dictator, Stalin (APDUSA 1987:6).

The writer(s) of this pamphlet go(es) on to attack the hypocrisy inherent in condemning the apartheid rulers "for violating these freedoms when those who condemn do the same to sister organisations" (APDUSA 1987:11).

More recently, a group of journalists and artists recalled the many different ways in which the misguided tactics of certain political groups during the mid-eighties in effect muzzled the press, including paradoxically, the alternative press, which had been midwived into being in South Africa by foreign liberals

and radicals precisely because the neofascist policies of the apartheid governments had all but destroyed the freedom of the press. The Executive Summary of the booklet in which their sad story is published opens as follows:

During the last few years . . . black journalists estimated that roughly 60 per cent of what was happening in the country did not reach the press. They indicated they were being subjected to an unofficial form of censorship, perpetrated by political activists, that was largely unrecognised and unreported. They described the risks journalists took if they wrote about sensitive issues, uncomfortable issues that many people believed should not be raised in public (SAIRR 1991:V).



This little booklet, which was published long after I had begun thinking about and drafting this address, is a mine of information on one of the most crucial themes of the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa. Those who wish to get a concrete picture of the scope of the problem as well as of the inevitable resistance generated by these liberatory attempts at thought control cannot do better than to read it with careful attention. The thrust of the publication is captured in the passionate cry of one of the journalists:

We do not believe that press censorship is evil only when it is perpetrated by the government, but also when it is applied by black organisations. We believe any suppression of information is evil whether it is done by a black government or a white government, the more so when it is done by organisations which themselves maintain that they are fighting for the liberation of our people. What freedom are we talking about if we are going to be told, 'This is how to think' (Mazwai 1991:17).

At the workshop from which this publication is derived, many speakers pointed out that the active censorship of the left is more severe than the

reactive censorship of the apartheid government. If one became the victim of the latter, one was usually hailed as a victim and a martyr not only in one's own immediate community but by the entire oppressed people and beyond that by the international community, ever ready to demonstrate solidarity from afar with the victims of racist oppression. On the other hand, when leftist political organisations acted against a journalist, nobody knew about it: "The government was overt, but nobody knew who the censors on the left were. They were very many and very dangerous" (SAIRR 1991:58).

In 1987, Karen Press noted how voraciously the cultural commissars were going about their work by putting pressure on cultural projects to refuse to support in any way those artists who did not pay allegiance to the UDF/ANC. If they did not carry out these orders, they stood the chance of being declared enemies of the people. In a footnote she comments as follows:

There is often more than a question of legitimation at stake. Individuals and groups who are not endorsed by the UDF have been vulnerable to physical attack on their property and their lives. While one cannot lay the responsibility for these attacks at the door of the UDF, its policy of defining all non-UDF initiatives as products of the enemy (i.e., equivalent to the work of the government and its agents) clearly encourages the instigators of such attacks to see these initiatives, and their organisers, as valid targets (Press 1990:40).

THE CULTURAL DESKS



The main instrument of liberatory censorship is ominously named the Cultural Desk. It calls up all the Kafkaesque nightmares of bureaucratic inflexibility, amorality, and philistine opportunism that one associates with the

machinery of government. During the mid-late eighties, a few organisations associated with the (Freedom) Charterist current in South Africa, in particular the now-dissolved United Democratic Front (UDF), either had a cultural desk or were somehow tied into the Cultural Desk. The facelessness and vagueness, in part paradoxically a mask donned as a defensive measure against the censorship and repression of the apartheid state, lent to this institution a certain heroic and mystifying aura that was calculated to enhance its ex cathedra authority.

By way of explaining the background to the birth of this potential monster, it should be noted that one of the medium-term strategic objectives of the liberation movement was/is the isolation of the apartheid regime from the international community. To this end, sports and cultural boycotts, including academic boycotts, as well as the cutting off of diplomatic links, economic sanctions, and arms embargoes have been promoted with more or less success ever since 1959. As a means of applying political pressure via the chokepoints of the apartheid system, the strategy cannot be faulted. All other things remaining equal, it had eventually to force the government to the negotiation table, if that was the long-term goal of the struggle— as, indeed, it always was for the ANC and its allied organisations. The actual dynamic operating in each particular sphere was, however, obviously different. Thus, e.g., while there was little difficulty from the point of view of the oppressed people in promoting an almost watertight sports boycott (since people classified white were almost exclusively the beneficiaries of international sporting contact as a result of apartheid policy), the same could not be said for the academic boycott and certain aspects of the cultural boycott.

For this reason, it made eminent sense to institute a consultative mechanism through which foreigners coming in or South Africans going out could inform themselves if they were sensitive to considerations of whether their actions would reinforce the apartheid regime or the liberation struggle. The crucial factor that would determine whether the Cultural Desk would devolve into a Censorship Board-In-Waiting was whether or not it was going to be given quasi-legislative powers. An advisory function under circumstances where, through the very isolation of the regime, little or nothing is known about the cultural-political landscape, not to say minefield, is clearly legitimate. A legislative function, on the other hand, which has to enforce a particular set

of party-politically inspired values, is something qualitatively different. The freedom of the individual artist (cultural worker) or academic to decide for him/herself cannot be circumscribed, no matter how convinced the people on the Cultural Desk might be about the correctness of their judgment. The opposite point of view leads on directly to physical intimidation and eventually to unjustifiable political murder.



It was because of the importance of this principle that I was constrained to clarify the acceptable democratic practices in the question of the academic boycott at the time of the O'Brien Affair at the University of Cape Town in 1986. The Irish academic and international diplomat had been physically intimidated and harassed by groups of students at UCT essentially because he had insulted the movement by (tactlessly) referring to the academic boycott as Micky-Mouse stuff. The students, however, justified their actions in terms of the lofty ideals of the international academic boycott and insisted that O'Brien would not be allowed to lecture anywhere in South Africa unless he apologised and got permission to be in the country as a lecturer from the progressive democratic movement, alias the Charterist organisations, alias the Cultural Desk. Rather unwisely, the authorities at UCT caved in to student pressure and gave a mealy-mouthed defence of their supine action. In response to the schizophrenic and often irrelevant discussion that ensued, I wrote, among other things, that:

whether or not a particular foreign (or South African!) academic (sportsperson, cultural worker, etc.) should be boycotted has to be decided in the normal course of democratic debate within the liberation movement. One person, or organisation, having become aware of the imminent or proposed arrival of some individual will, as normally happens, raise the matter in the relevant forum(s) and from there the discussion will circle out and one or other relevant group in the liberatory camp will take up the matter, appeal for support from other groups, and so forth. This is the democratic way and we must defend and protect this way of doing these and other things in our movement (Alexander 1990:99).

The terrible irony in the situation did not escape those of us who were concerned not primarily about power but rather about freedom. Through the ill-considered, unthought-through ideas and practices of the hidden persuaders, including these would-be cultural commissars, which were further vulgarised in the hysterical atmosphere of South Africa's townships in the mid-eighties, a period of extremely brutal repression, the liberation movement was fast becoming a mirror image of the very forces it was fighting against.

In the sphere of education, for example, the politically exciting and pedagogically creative notion of People's Education, coined at an important popular conference on the education crisis held at the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) in December 1985, was quickly devalued and rendered so narrowly sectarian that it was no different in form and in its political consequences from the National Party's hated concept of Christian National Education. It became an hallucinogenic tablet of merely indoctrinational value, the end result of which was the cessation of all education.

In this particular case, the role of liberatory or active censorship was particularly gross. In order to draw a clear dividing line between the hegemonic thrust of the Charterist current at this time and the immediate past, which had been shaped largely in the image and likeness of the Black Consciousness Movement, various hamhanded attempts at historical gerrymandering were undertaken to give the impression that the concept of People's Education was the glittering progeny of an immaculate conception. Historical discontinuity was insinuated into the record through ruthless falsification, largely through the simple method of omitting anything that would spoil the impression of linear progress within the parameters of Charterism from the early fifties. In an address that I delivered at the University of Natal in August 1988, I attempted to correct the historical record and condemned in no uncertain terms the practices of those liberal and radical academics who connived at these lobotomising historiographical practices:

I believe that the new radical pedagogy that all of us are trying to understand and to concretise has no place for undemocratic and even totalitarian suppressions and falsifications of the historical record of the important social practices with which we happen not to be directly

concerned. To tolerate this kind of philistinism and intellectual timidity is to undermine everything that we say we believe in. To believe that only those groups who pay allegiance or genuflect to the NECC are kosher is to negate a priori everything we say about so-called democracy (Alexander 1990:62).

In one authoritative or prestigious history after another, the bandwagon of a triumphalist Charterism was boarded by one well-known historian or social scientist after another. History, as E.H. Carr (1965:126) wrote with considerable acidity, is (re)written from the point of view of the century makers rather than that of those who were apparently bowled for a duck. (I must apologise for not being able to translate this cricketing metaphor into the language of baseball.) As a result, the splendid and significant contributions to the history of the South African liberation struggle of organisations and groups such as the Non-European Unity Movement in the forties and fifties, the Black Consciousness Movement in the seventies and eighties, the National Forum in the early mid-eighties, simply disappeared from the pages of recently written historical works. This time-serving attitude of tippexing out vitally necessary elements of our history and thus leaving large white spots in the record of the struggle of the black people in the hope of ingratiating themselves with their probable new masters was a particularly disturbing feature of some liberal and many radical historians and other social scientists. In a sense, they were anticipating the intervention of the Cultural Desk by acts of self-censorship through which they violated their scholarly integrity. They consequently produced works in which South African history was portrayed as the ineluctable Hegelian unfolding of the Charterist Idea. By doing so, they may well have prostituted their craft, but at least they evaded the humiliations of the author of *Township Fever*, the playwright Mbongeni Ngema, who was forced "to change sections of his script so that it would more clearly support the struggle" as a result of "a lot of protest from the unions and the cultural desk" (Lindberg 1991:41). These historians, however, forget that in history, unlike on the cricket field, it is not so easy to recognise the century makers even when one or another group seems to be running ahead of all competitors. Mao Tse-Tung, apocryphally no doubt, refused to say whether he thought the great French Revolution of 1789 had

succeeded, on the grounds that it was much too early to tell. In these days of the disintegration of Soviet Russia, those words have an added poignancy.

THE DEBATE IN SOUTH AFRICA



The many details of this process need not be recounted here. Suffice it to say that the process is abundantly obvious to all of us on the ground and has been addressed tentatively in a few journalistic and scholarly works to some of which I have referred here. At present, there is a more subdued but ongoing debate about the role of culture in South Africa (see, e.g., de Kok and Press 1990). More and more people are questioning the wisdom of conceptualising culture as (only) an instrument of struggle. One of South Africa's most respected literary critics and creative writers has tried to delineate carefully the relationship between liberatory politics and the arts.

The arts should not be regarded as a mere means to an end— as a means to manipulate public thought, for example. That is one function they can play. But that function can degenerate into being a purely manipulative venture in which even those in the forefront of the struggle can use art to limit and contain the expressive capacity of the people. For that reason, the manipulative function of art can be a potentially reactionary one. The need is consciously to accord the arts a structural function in society. . . . The function of art in society should outlive the limits of asserting that we need the arts to mobilize people, as a primary goal, rather we should say we need the arts because they extend limits of democratic participation. So it should be with cultural practice in general (Ndebele 1989:96).

But despite this healthy, if belated, doubt, the simplifying totalitarian dogmas refuse to be put to rest. How prevalent such essentially defensive attitudes are is abundantly clear from the most recent pronouncements of the Cultural Desk. According to ANC activist Naledi Ntsiki, cultural workers are not only social leaders but also arbiters of what was and what wasn't progressive art. Commenting on the ethos of Ntsiki's keynote address at the launching of the Mass Democratic Movement's national cultural desk, Kaiser Nyatumba, himself a poet, writer, and senior political journalist on the Johannesburg paper, the *Star*, quotes a *Weekly Mail* colleague as follows:

In the end . . . there was the old arrogance. Culture belongs to the commissars. Culture is the baby sister of politics, to be guided and chastised or indulged and petted at the whim of its social elders. . . . One was left with the same old questions about the cultural desk and its satellite structures, seriously and not merely rhetorically. Which people? What culture? (Nyatumba 1991:34).

Nyatumba goes on to point out that the views of the Cultural Desk are often at variance with those of other spokespersons of the ANC and the Charterist Movement (Nyatumba 1991:34-35), and Dawn Lindberg (1991:42) believes that the Desk itself is attempting to correct its ways. There is no doubt in my mind that the founding of the Library and Information Workers' Organisation (of South Africa) is a ray of light that may help powerfully to counteract the darkness and the gloom in which the practices of the Desk have enveloped the movement for liberation. According to its founding documents, LIWOSA believes that:

everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and that this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media [and commits itself to] . . . [t]he selection, presentation and distribution of information to all, without prejudice, and to resisting any attempt to interfere with that objective (LIWO 1990).

If the members of LIWOSA and related organisations have the courage of their convictions, we can rest easy since any totalitarian hubris on the part of Cultural Desks would quickly be identified and counteracted.

THE DILEMMAS OF FREEDOM



These all-too-brief comments on what may turn out to be one of the pivotal questions in a future South Africa lead me inevitably to some general questions about the problem of censorship in a society that aspires to freedom. All writers on the subject are agreed that a measure of censorship in one form or another is unavoidable. Those who would use the censorship of books in order to mould humanity in their own unblemished image and likeness insist that even in the freest of capitalist democracies, censorship operates through the free market. They maintain with good reason, let it be said, that in such cases, publishers function as censors, because they desire "nothing more than to suppress good literature in order to get rich on trash" (Darnton 1991:46).

However simplistic this view of the problem may be, it does point to the many dilemmas of freedom in this particular sphere. A society without censorship would have to permit and subsidise the production of all possible literature. To state the problem is to negate it under the conditions obtaining in most countries of the world today. Then there is the exigencies-of-war argument. The devious practices of war propaganda and of the dirty tricks departments of the intelligence services of most countries in our world today are usually justified on the basis of the principle *salus rei publicae suprema lex*. By the simplest of logical extensions, those who fight against tyranny in civil wars and in struggles for national liberation use the same argument. Is this a valid procedure? Should a commitment to the respect for human dignity disarm the

principled adversary and thus render that side vulnerable to the superior arms of the enemy that has no such commitment? One need but pose the question to realise the depth of our dilemma. And yet there are very clear answers. One of these is that the undermining of the principle of freedom of speech has to be counteracted at all times as far as is possible. No violation of the principle should be allowed without definite limits on time and space, i.e., if actual physical survival may be jeopardised by the unfettered exercise of the right—as in warfare. Lenin, after all, is said to have condoned censorship as a temporary measure (see Choldin and Friedberg 1989:xiii), but clearly, it became a principle of Soviet government.

It must be accepted that in the short periods when survival may necessitate the suspension of the principle for limited purposes, the monitors, i.e., censors, should be obliged by law to err on the side of tolerance. As soon as the emergency situation has come to an end, the untrammelled exercise of all civic freedoms has to be restored. Our dilemma is all too obvious. But there is hope in the thought that a people accustomed to freedom of speech and to democracy, more generally, will not tolerate the curtailment of these freedoms beyond what is patently reasonable in times of emergency. On the difficult question of the regulation of public access to materials deemed to be pornographic, Judge Easterbrook made the following courageous statement for the Seventh Circuit:

Under the First Amendment, the government must leave to the people the evaluation of ideas. Bald or subtle, an idea is as powerful as the audience allows it to be . . . (Dworkin 1991:14- 15).

It is with a sense of genuine irony that I remind you in conclusion that it was the young Karl Marx who insisted that "[a]s long as censorship exists, all civil liberties remain illusory."

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