

THE FREEDOM of THE PRESS

 am well acquainted with all the arguments against freedom of thought and speech.—the arguments which claim that it cannot exist, and the arguments which claim that it ought not to. I answer simply that they don't convince me, and that our civilization over a period of four hundred years has been founded on the opposite notion. For quite a decade past I have believed that the existing Russian régime is a mainly evil thing, and I claim the right to say so, in spite of the fact that we are allies with the USSR in a war which I want to see won. If I had to choose a text to justify myself, I should choose the line from Milton:

By the known rules of ancient liberty.

The word *ancient* emphasizes the fact that intellectual freedom is a deep-rooted tradition without which our characteristic western culture could only doubtfully exist. From that tradition many of our intellectuals are visibly turning away. They have accepted the principle that a book should be published or suppressed, praised or damned, not on its merits but according to political expediency. And others who do not actually hold this view assent to it from sheer cowardice. An example of this is the failure of the numerous and vocal English pacifists to raise their voices against the prevalent worship of Russian militarism. According to those pacifists, all violence is evil, and they have urged us at every stage of the war to give in or at least to make a compromise peace. But how many of them have ever suggested that war is also evil when it is waged by the Red Army? Apparently the Russians have a right to defend themselves, whereas for us to do [so] is a deadly sin. One can only explain this contradiction in one way: that is, by a cowardly desire to keep in with the bulk of the intelligentsia, whose patriotism is directed towards the USSR rather than towards Britain. I know that the English intelligentsia have plenty of reason for their timidity and dishonesty; indeed I know by heart the arguments by which they justify themselves. But at least let us have no more nonsense about defending liberty.

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against Fascism. If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear. The common people still vaguely subscribe to that doctrine and act on it. In our country — it is not the same in all countries; it was not so in republican France, and it is not so in the USA today — it is the liberals who fear liberty and the intellectuals who want to do dirt on the intellect; it is to draw attention to that fact that I have written this preface.

Extract from The Freedom of the Press, by George Orwell. Proposed Preface to Animal Farm, 1945. First published: The Times Literary Supplement, September 15, 1972.

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