

"THE WAR AND FREEDOM OF THOUGHT"

Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen. The subject of "Freedom of thought in ~~Wartime~~" has proved to be not an easy one by any means. I must confess that at the outset I thought to myself "I shall look up a little of ^{Milton's 'Anapagitia', Lecky's 'Rise of Rationalism in Europe'} and my ^{old friend} Prof. Burfy's "~~The~~ History of Freedom of Thought"; but a little time spent in reading these satisfied me that ~~this~~ was not sufficient. These writers dealt with the subject of the freedom of thought when society was being rebuilt in regard to its superstructure rather than in respect of ~~its~~ social fundamen-
 tals and for them therefore, it was an easy matter to find agree-
 ment on certain fundamental premises. Whereas today, I feel that the social fundamentals are in ~~issue~~.

Now a great deal of rubbish is talked about freedom of thought. Many writers and those inevitable liars, the poets, are apt to say that you can never chain thought. Thought of it-
 self is fancy free and you cannot chain it. "Stone Walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage" is one ^{example} and from the mouth of an early Shakesperean character - "There is nothing good or evil in this world but thinking makes it so." Thought in the mouth of this Shakesperean Mary Baker Eddyite was free to create good or evil at will. We get for another example Francis Bacon's statement that "The thought of man is not ~~triable~~ for the Devil ^{himself} alone knows ^{it} the thought of man," - Written no doubt, when he was thinking no one would discover the bribe he was taking at the time.

We know that you can chain thought by a very simple de-
 vice; by controlling communication between human beings in all its forms. The individual mind we find is chained in three par-
 ticular ways. First of all there is the chaining of the mind by the control of the information that comes to it. Secondly, it is chained by the incapacitation of the mind to deal with any such matter as does reach it and thirdly by the mind being

prevented from giving out again what it has acquired as knowledge.

The curtailing of information we need not dwell on, nor is it necessary for me to address you on the corruption of our press. We have examples of it in book bannings, film censorship and the stopping of meetings. But in all these ways of curtailing the matter with which minds must deal, we overlook the self-operating censorship we make upon the mind and the matters that we are to deal with when we are influenced by fear. And indeed in modern circumstances that fear is a very potent influence in stopping people from applying their mind to a great number of things. Those are the influences curtailing the incoming influences to the mind.

Now, the incapacitating of the thinker himself. ^{Of course} People with a capacity to think don't get jobs. We ~~now~~ ^{may} pass ^{however} to the consideration of education; of the complete and deliberate withholding of education from the masses of the people. }

The Waterburg Native cannot consider **Art** or History or social problems because, first of all the material is denied him. But even if it were accessible to him, the training, the education, the self development necessary to thinking about such subject matter is denied him and deliberately denied him.

That is one aspect of the matter. There is a more malicious program of instilling into the mind, particularly in ^{the} immature stage, the young mind, false general ideas calculated to make the student fit into the capitalist system of society. False ideas of patriotism are instilled into the mind of youth, ideas of loyalty, twisted to a specific purpose, and vicious ideas of meek obedience as the finest attribute that man can acquire. Youth reacts as we know to pageantry, mummery and symbolism and these false general ideas lurk in the symbolism and mummery put before them and instilled into their minds systematically.

The third and equally forceful restraint on freedom of thought is that you are not free to ~~get~~ ^{pass on to others.} it ~~out~~. Assume that you get the information and have the capacity to think about it;

Thought still remains a sterile achievement unless you can pass on to others the result of the operation of your mind. Thought that is uncommunicable dries up at its source. Thought cannot exist if it is a functionless junket^{ing} of the mind without the right of communicating to other minds. Those are the three general restraints on thought.

Consider the reaction of the average man to the subject of the freedom of thought. I think I may first say that the average man recognizes one way and another that the mind is in chains under the existing circumstances. Usually ~~the~~^{his} thought on that subject takes the form: ~~of~~ "How lucky that we are not like Germany!" but little does the ordinary man realise that ~~it~~ is just a matter of degree or we would be like Germany. I think the average man's attitude toward freedom of thought is like that of a Scotchman who attended a special service. Sandy had come to hear a famous preacher. He went to the church and after his return from the service his friends asked him, "Did you go to the service?" Sandy answered, "Yes, I went." "And what of the sermon?" asked his friends. "Well, it was a good sermon," he said. "And what did he say, what did he speak about?" "Well, it was about redemption through the Blood". "Well, what did he say about it?" asked his friends. Sandy's answer was, "Well, he appeared to be in favour of it." I think one may say that the average man when asked what is his opinion of freedom of thought "appears to be in favour of it." But if he is in favour of it, he very soon gets into an astonishing number of difficulties.

Let us take a few concrete examples. It is no use standing for freedom of thought in South Africa today and at the same time urging that the Ossawabrandwag must be locked up. On the other hand, it is no use ^{to urge} that the Ossawabrandwag should be set free to oppose freedom of thought.

Another example; if national unity in support of the war effort today is an essential thing, it is plain that you must suppress subversive thought. But if you decide to suppress

subversive thought and do so, then you will never know whether ^{directed towards} the national unity and national effort is the correct thing. The very discussion, the determination of that issue, of your main premise, is brought into question. The examples of this circular argument are very numerous.

We had an example of this the other evening when Mr. Hofmeyer was broadcasting. Though Mr. Hofmeyer is one whose acquaintance with logic ^{probably} ended with the text books of 1902, he is acquainted with logic, yet he used the following argument in his broadcast. He said " The question is broached as to whether we must support the war and he said we must support the war in South Africa. We must support the war because "it is not an imperialist war. I shall prove to you that it is not. Why? It is not an Imperialist war because all the Dominions are supporting it." Those are the types of contradictions you get into if you approach the problem from a simple man's point of view.

Perhaps a profounder contradiction should be mentioned before I pass on to the solutions. The profound contradiction is this: that if you want national unity for a particular purpose, such as the conduct of a war, the suppression of divergent thought is essential to the creation of national strength. On the other hand, if you create national strength by the suppression of thought it implies an inevitable weakness because you are building up human dynamite ^{but} ~~an~~ improper lines of conduct. That is one of the contradictions when you consider this subject. And when the average man thinks of these contradictions he stops thinking and concludes, "Well, anyway what I think is right", and he ceases to think of the matter as a social question as to what ought to be done on the subject of freedom of thought.

Now, I am going to give you the correct view, or rather what I consider to be the correct view that leads to the solution of these contradictions and you will perhaps pardon me if it becomes a little philosophical. First of all, the solution to these contradictions has to be sought in the very nature of thought itself. Thought always and of necessity ~~must~~

functions in chains. It is true you can play at thinking if you wish to do so, as a little girl plays at being a mother with her dolls, but the significance of real thought depends on the extent of its accuracy in reflecting the actual material world outside. Now, if that is real thought, it is only meaningful ^{in so far} as it corresponds to external actuality. What then is free thought? Free thought is thought directed at grasping external reality with a view to adapting and changing that external reality. We must be free to adapt and alter the chains of our environment. Free thought means creative action. Thought is the ideological basis of creative action in the external world because thought is of no use for any other purpose than creative action. *Thought must correspond to external reality or it is useless; but it is also useless unless it enables us to change that external reality.*

I would like to turn just briefly to support these propositions by regarding what history tells us about thought and in doing so I think we should remove from our minds sedulously the mystical nonsense that too frequently dogs our ^{intellectual} footsteps. We must not think of thought as the "divine part" of man, distinguishing him from the animals. If it was, it arrived very late. We must not let ourselves be confused by the platonic statement "In the beginning was the Word", because there were no words in the beginning as we well know. Thought is a biological quality that has emerged in man. It is a qualitative change.

Just as when heat is applied to a vessel of water ~~and~~ the quantity of heat increases until the boiling point is reached and a qualitative change emerges and you get steam and there is no longer water at all, So, similarly, dead matter as we know from the earliest stage when the universe was in flux, - dead matter developed until it became a variety of albumens and in the albumens there appears to have emerged this new quality of life, organized albuminous living matter. Life proceeded over aeons of development until organized living matter suddenly developed a new quality - thought, or consciousness. It is simply a material development that took place in living matter. ^{no doubt} ~~but~~ the origin of life is still obscure amongst scientists; But the emergence of thought in the animal world is not obscure. We see it emerge.

We see different stages and degrees of thought in animals; and we see it emerge in our children.

Now, if that is the common and realistic history of the emergence of thought, two points of very great importance ^{become clear.} ~~emerge~~. In the first place, it is obvious at a glance that thought is an instrument in the struggle for survival; an instrument of animal life useful in the struggle for survival. And in the second place, without communication from man to man, there could be no such thing as the social system. No social system could emerge without that basis. Thought enables human cooperation to take form and that thought that enables human cooperation to take form is the very basis of the particular form of society.

Now I think it will be obvious to ^{people} ~~us~~ of the Left what thought is valid and what thought is invalid or useless. Clearly it ^{must} correspond to the reality around us in our environment, but it has to correspond in such a way as to fit us for the struggle of survival. In other words, it has an instrumental purpose and when it fails of that purpose it is unimportant. One does not struggle to use a tool for no purpose or for a non-suitable purpose and thought is only useful and usable as ~~an~~ individual and social possession, as an instrument in the struggle for survival.

If we want freedom of thought it can only be that we wish through the instrumentality of that thought to recreate and change our environment. Freedom of thought in any other fantastic sense is bourgeois nonsense. Let us apply these reflections about the function of thought to our present two-class society.

Is it not clear to us that the oppressing class does not wish the working class to think, because it does not wish the working class to have that tool in its possession which will enable it to create a new society? It is necessary however, for the workers to think whatever happens, because it is necessary to their survival, and not only is it necessary to their survival, but it is also necessary for the survival of that Old Man of the Sea, Capitalism, which they carry on their backs. It is impossible ultimately to deprive the workers

of thought unless you deprive them of life. It is like clipping the wings of birds to hinder their escape ^{from danger.} when freedom of thought is removed from the working class. Naturally it is the logical and proper thing to deprive the working class of their thought and clip their wings in this manner in order to deprive them of their instrument of liberation, if you are determined that ~~the instrument of~~ their subjection is to continue. It is only if it is not to continue that there is any point in calling for liberty of thought, and particularly is this so in war time. ^{It is.} In war time ~~that~~ the people, because they ^{are} subjected to extraordinary sufferings, learn so quickly; ~~then~~ ^{then} they feel they are in danger of personal annihilation unless they can liberate their thought, as it is the instrument of their survival.

I can assume that we realise that history is with the working class, provided they awaken to use it and to create in it historically. The contradiction ~~is~~ that we see the employing classes involved in ~~today~~ are sharpening every day. They want to keep knowledge from the people but at the same time for their campaigns of war they need science. Science used in war needs many people that know and understand thoroughly, and those many people must ^{therefore} have correct scientific knowledge. Therefore they are in this tangle of wanting to keep people stupid and on the other hand they are forced to make people know and understand.

In another sense they are being defeated at every point. During a period such as the present one in which we live, the capacity of the average person for inference from very small data is growing. We are learning to read our newspapers: We are learning to understand from an adjective, a wrong comma and ~~#~~ such very small indices ~~put~~ ^{put} into the twisted information put before us, what the real motivations behind it are; and from those perusals we know a great deal more than we would have known had our minds ~~not~~ been attuned by the fact that the truth is being withheld.

I remember a young German Communist telling me that when he was thrown into a concentration camp he learned from a fellow there how to read a newspaper. "My God", he said, "what that fellow could get out of the most garbled account!" We are all becoming pretty good at that sort of game. Thought finding its way around for its own preservation.

There are other ways of escape for thought. For instance, you can watch the Stock Exchange. The people who watch the Stock Exchange are for the most part, positive shareholders; ^{they own shares and} that is they want to see their shares go up in value. But the working class when they look at the Stock Exchange reports ^{can} ~~could~~ be regarded as negative shareholders, because when the shares slump they know that a blow has been struck at Capitalism ^{in which they are mightily interested.} ~~somewhere in the world~~ ^{Somewhere in the world} and the workers are getting stronger; ~~that~~ at some point in the world the sensitive ears of capital have caught the danger signal and there is an unloading of capital which may ^{now} have less "life" in it because of the rise of the working class.

Most people think that when there is a victory shares will go up. Now we have just had a victory, a big victory - ~~Topbruk~~ - but shares have gone down. Why? ^{Probably} ~~Because~~ there is something happening in Roumania which the liars don't tell us. So the sharpened capacity of observation of the people at large is another way around.

The Left Book Club, I think, has had (at any rate in its English headquarters) some trouble with the attitude adopted by Mr. Gollanz and Mr. Strachey of late. They have issued a book on "Marxism and Democracy". A disgraceful book, a book written dishonestly at almost every page, where quotations are distorted and cut in the best newspaper manner and where conclusions are erroneously put forward on premises implied, suggested, hinted at, but not stated. The whole book is a very old type of swindle, an exposed swindle and alas, a swindle in which John Strachey joins with a considerable measure of praise. It would be interesting if members of the audience would read this book and see if

they would be taken in or whether they could see through the deception.

The practice in Russia of the average Russian participants in public affairs has trained them to a measure of smelling out the anti-class elements in another man's mind, thought and conduct with an astonishing precision, and we too, I hope, owing to the unpleasantness of the present age in which we live are acquiring the capacity for smelling out the false.

In conclusion, ^{let me} say, the fight for the freedom of thought in itself is, of course, meaningless. It only acquires meaning when brought into the context of the class struggle, the real issue that is before you. It is only in that relationship that thought assumes its importance and its function. To fight for freedom of thought on any other basis is as unreasonable as buying a piano when you can't play. But the fight for the freedom of thought does become a profound and real thing and not a fatuous contradictory struggle when it becomes part and parcel of the workers' cause and part and parcel of their capacity to create a new society.

I suppose there may be many in the audience who would have said, "Well, Stalin does not allow ~~free thought~~ ^{free thought} in Russia." Of course he doesn't! He only allows workers' thought to be free and the freedom he aims at involves the admitted suppression of bourgeois thought. The reason why the Bolsheviks' attitude toward freedom of thought is worthy, is a very simple reason: All men can become workers but all men cannot become capitalists. And they understand that ^{they} must establish the ~~basis~~ ^{basis} of freedom of a future society which will be a single class society. For this reason real freedom of thought can only come in a classless society and cannot exist apart from it.

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