

A LETTER
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A CRUCIAL DISCUSSION FOR DEMOCRACY

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As an organized movement, the defense of freedom of the press was born from the need to overcome the limitations of the censorship imposed by the Absolutist State. The right to freedom of expression, defended in manifestoes such as *Areopagite* by John Milton in the XVII century, who was protesting the monopoly of censorship created by the English government, took on new importance with the proclamation of the Constitution of the United States, in the XVIII century, which established it as an unalienable right, and acquired legitimacy as a doctrine with the *Essay on Liberty* by Stuart Mill in XIX century England, during the bourgeoisie's rise to power in the State.

One hundred years later, in the XX century, the action of the press in the two World Wars revealed that it was time for a discussion with regard to limits on the practice of journalism. Transformed into one of the most profitable areas of capitalism, the press was far from merely supporting the public interest; instead, it frequently acted in its own interest or in defense of inadmissible interests. The creation of Special Committees for studying the possibilities of regulating the activity of the press in the United States and in England in the post-war period is only one of the indications of the uneasiness caused by mass journalism since the last century.

Starting in the middle of the XX century, a group of initiatives has been identified whose purpose has been to regulate the practice of journalism and which range from individual actions such as the hiring of

Ombudsmen, through the creation of independent press observatories, to the approval of specific legislation in several countries. In this beginning of the millennium it seems clear that the full exercising of democracy, at the same time that it presupposes the existence of a free press, also requires the development of legislation which establishes parameters of quality for journalistic institutions. If we wish to have a kind of journalism at the service of society, the first step should be the recognition that as in all other human activities, the press is not above the law, but needs to be regulated in the form of the law.

In this edition of **Brazilian Journalism Research**, in association with the UNESCO, we offer a group of works whose challenge is to promote discussion regarding the concept of freedom of the press in contemporary societies, the need for regulation of this activity and the presentation of some concrete initiatives for evaluating journalistic institutions. At a time such as this, with profound transformations in press activity itself, increasingly an initiative of large transnational conglomerates, rather than the intransigent defense of false myths and dogmas, a reflection on the limits and possibilities of the press would seem to be appropriate. The Brazilian Association of Journalism Researchers, in association with the UNESCO, is pleased to contribute to this debate and to encourage everyone to become involved in this crucial discussion for the future of democracy in our country and in the world. Enjoy your reading!

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