

MYTHS ABOUT PRESS FREEDOM

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ABSTRACT

This article intends to rectify three popular beliefs related to press freedom: (1) that the idea of a free marketplace of ideas with a self-righting truth belongs to original liberalism, (2) that UNESCO's primary mission is to promote freedom of information, and (3) that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides legal safeguards for the media. These beliefs are shown, on the basis of the legacy of liberalism and documents of the international community, to be misleading myths. Instead of accurate readings of the idea of freedom, they serve as ideological positions which are harmful to democracy. The Millennium Declaration provides further proof that the international community has a much more balanced view of freedom of information than that typically held by media professionals. Therefore it is important to liberate the concept of press freedom from its ideological baggage.

KEY-WORDS

Freedom of information, liberalism, UNESCO, United Nations, international law.

Introduction

Freedom is one of the most pervasive elements of modern thought – both the popular consciousness and expert conceptualization of the human being, society and the world at large. Together with other fundamental tenets such as development and democracy, freedom is part and parcel of the big story of history called “modernity” which has dominated especially western thinking for the past 2-3 centuries. The end of the 20th century was a turning point not only in the formal calendar introducing a new millennium but also because of the “Collapse of Communism”, which followed the end of the Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe, leaving behind the division of the world into

capitalist West, socialist East and the mixed South – China, Cuba and North Korea remaining pockets of socialism amid the mass of global capitalism. During the Cold War, freedom served as a central argument in the ideological warfare by the West against the East and partly also against the “Third World”. Now that this strategic employment of the idea of freedom has terminated, there is a need to take a fresh look at its substance and to liberate it from the ideological baggage accumulated in the past.

The challenge of deconstructing such a central element in our thinking – both everyday and academic – is naturally enormous and cannot be but touched upon in one article. Here we focus on press freedom – not freedom of speech at large – and we do so by singling out three well-known cases which highlight the misconceptions about freedom when applied to the media. The first case takes us back to the classics of liberal thought, particularly to John Milton’s *Areopagitica* of 1644 and to John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* of 1859. Neither of them proves to be the source of the doctrine whereby there must be a free marketplace of ideas which itself ensures that truth will prevail. This doctrine was shaped only in the 20th century USA, first in legal and political debates between the two World Wars and finally during the Cold War in the 1950s. Hence it is a myth to take the concept of a free marketplace of ideas as part and parcel of original liberalism¹.

The two other cases relate to landmark documents of the international community which are typically misused to uphold a biased western view of press freedom: UNESCO’s Constitution of 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Moreover, we highlight the Millennium Declaration of 2000. All these documents introduce an idea of media freedom which is quite nuanced and far from the absolutist notion conventionally advocated especially by commercial media proprietors – namely that freedom in this field means absence of State control, including legal regulation other than safeguards against censorship. International law does not support this notion of negative freedom; what is suggested instead is a notion of positive freedom whereby freedom is not an end product to be protected as such but a means to ensure other more general objectives such as peace and democracy.

This article aims to make a point with selected cases and does not intend to give a comprehensive presentation of the big issues involved. It is deliberately one-sided and may appear provocative to those believing in the myths in question².

Free marketplace of ideas and the legacy of liberalism

Fred Siebert summarizes his essay on the libertarian theory in *Four Theories of the Press* as follows:

The libertarian theory of the function of the mass media in a democratic society has had a long and arduous history. This history has paralleled the development of democratic principles in government and free enterprise in economics. The theory itself can trace a respected lineage among the philosophers of ancient times, but it received its greatest impetus from the developments in Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From Milton to Holmes it has stressed the superiority of the principle of individual freedom and judgment and the axiom that truth when allowed free rein will emerge victorious from any encounter. Its slogans have been the "self-righting process" and the "free market place of ideas." It has been an integral part of the great march of democracy which has resulted in the stupendous advancement of the well-being of humanity. It has been the guiding principle of western civilization for more than two hundred years. (SIEBERT, PETERSON & SCHRAMM, 1956: 70)

This text, more than anything else, has fuelled the myth that the idea of a free marketplace of ideas with its mechanism of self-righting truth belongs to the core of liberalism, based on Milton and Mill. *The Four Theories* became a baseline for thinking about the media systems in the world as it filled a gap in textbooks on journalism and mass communication. However, its popularity did not correspond to its scholarly weight and its ideological basis was quite shaky, as shown by the critical assessment coming from its home base, the College of Communications at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (NERONE, 1995).

In point of fact, the doctrine of a free marketplace of ideas with a self-righting truth cannot be found in the works of Milton and Mill. Neither of these classics of liberalism introduced the concept of marketplace of ideas, although both did advocate freedom of thought and speech without prior censorship. The following two sentences from Milton's pamphlet *Areopagitica* are usually quoted as proof that he is the father of the concept of self-correcting truth:

And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter? (ALTSCHULL, 1990: 40).

Actually Milton does not claim here that truth will automatically prevail; his point is to oppose the licensing and censorship of printing. He insisted that all kinds of views should be allowed to be brought to the public and allowed to clash without hindrance. His philosophical view would nowadays be called a maxim of pluralism, whereby we would not find the truth without also encountering falsehood. Milton was passionately opposed to forbidding anything to be published, comparing censorship to murder: "he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God". In his main work *Paradise Lost* of 1667, Milton elaborated the struggle between truth and falsehood and made a fervent appeal to challenge official truths, including God's commandments, with an invitation even to commit sins as a means to acquire knowledge and to achieve human growth and development. Accordingly, truth will not automatically prevail but must be cultivated in an active and radical process. This view is simply incompatible with the concept of self-righting truth. In short, Milton cannot be taken as an early advocate of market liberalism: "Call him radical, call him puritan, call him republican, but do not call him (neo)liberal." (PETERS, 2005: 72)

The myth about Milton as a source of the doctrine of a free marketplace of ideas and self-righting truth began to emerge in the trial of Thomas Paine in absentia held in the late 18th century. Paine, author of *The Rights of Man* (1791) and activist in both the American and French revolutions, was accused in Britain of inciting revolution in his native country, whose elite was furious about the revolutionary ideas. Paine's defense lawyer, Thomas Erskine, used Milton's *Areopagitica* to prove that no good government needed to be afraid of open discussion and in his argumentation Erskine twisted Milton's point into the concept of self-righting truth. This argument availed nothing in the proceedings against Paine but it brought about an erroneous version of Milton's thinking. (KEANE, 1991)

John Stuart Mill, who had minutely scrutinized what Milton had written two centuries earlier, shared the position about the free encounter of ideas and the inadmissibility of censorship. His *On Liberty* is a fine elaboration of the same theme but it does not include anything about markets, let alone about a free marketplace of ideas. The rest of Mill's production is likewise void in this respect. For a liberal he was far from dogmatic about the role of the State, considering that state intervention may well be necessary in ensuring social justice and other higher values. Also, freedom of opinion and its expression was not for Mill an end in itself; he viewed it as "the necessity for the mental well-being of mankind (on which all their other well-being depends)", as he expressed the ultimate objective in his summary of the grounds for pursuing this freedom.

As to the concept of self-righting truth, Mill actually held a contrary view, whereby it was quite possible that truth failed to prevail in a free encounter and falsehood became a dominant public opinion. In *On Liberty* he dismissed the concept of self-righting truth as a “pleasant falsehood”. Later Mill had a bitter personal experience of how falsehood may prevail: with his wife, Harriet Taylor-Mill, he fought for women’s emancipation but failed to gain broader support and even became an object of ridicule, finally losing his seat in Parliament.

Consequently, it is a myth that the standard justification for press freedom based on the doctrine of free marketplace of ideas comes from the classics of liberalism. Milton and Mill do not provide direct support for contemporary neo-liberalism and cannot be taken as the basis for a libertarian theory of the press. The legacy of original liberalism represents rather social democracy and corresponds to a social responsibility theory of the press proposed by the Hutchins Commission in the USA in 1947. The concept of freedom in the original liberal philosophy was positive rather than negative: freedom *for* something, not freedom *from* something.

Where, then, are the roots of the doctrine of free marketplace of ideas, apart from the trial of Thomas Paine in the 1790s? An often quoted source in the literature is the proceedings in 1919 against Russian emigrants in New York, accused of distributing anti-American leaflets (supporting the socialist revolution of 1917). In this process Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes referred to “free trade in ideas – that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market” (PETERS, 2004: 71). However, as John Durham Peters points out, this is not literally speaking the doctrine and slogan of a free marketplace of ideas.

Peters (2004) traces the first uses of the phrase “free marketplace of ideas” to the pages of *The New York Times* in the routine political discourse of the 1930s, but a more profound occurrence before the 1948 Congressional election campaign comes from an unusual quarter: the Communist Party of the USA, which wanted to campaign “in a free marketplace of ideas”. Obviously American leftists employed the slogan as a defense against rising anticommunism. However, Peters (2004: 72-79) shows that the context of the Cold War soon turned around the political sponsorship of the slogan and that already in 1953 *The New York Times* used it as an argument against the Eastern European countries which had censorship to prevent the emergence of a free marketplace of ideas.

It was in this intellectual and political climate that the doctrine became ingrained in the libertarian theory of the *Four Theories of the Press*. Accordingly, it is correct to say, as suggested by Nerone (1995), that this

theoretical construct is built on an ideological Cold War foundation and that it has little in common with the legacy of original liberalism.

Free flow of information and the constitution of UNESCO

UNESCO presents itself typically as a defender of freedom – not the least press freedom. Its website (<http://www.unesco.org/>) introduces the relevant sector as follows:

The Communication and Information Sector (CI) was established in its present form in 1990. Its programs are rooted in UNESCO's Constitution, which requires the Organization to promote "free flow of ideas by word and image"...

Let us read carefully what UNESCO's Constitution says about the promotion of "free flow of information by word and image":

1. The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.

2. To realize this purpose the Organization will:

a) Collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication and to that end recommend such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image;

Here the free flow of ideas is supposed to serve the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples (Article 2(a)), which in turn is subjected to the overriding purpose of contributing to peace and security (Article 1). Thus UNESCO's constitutional mission is not to promote the free flow as such – as a simple and isolated aspect – but to do it for the purpose of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples for the higher cause of peace and security. Moreover, Article 2 (a) specifies that UNESCO's promotion of the free flow should take place by means of collaboration and through international agreements. It is also noteworthy that Article 1 determines UNESCO's overall mandate to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for human rights and fundamental freedoms as affirmed by the UN Charter.

The conceptual structure of the constitutional stipulation is quite clear, with the mandate to promote free flow placed on the third level below (1) peace and security and (2) mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples. The reference to human rights and fundamental freedoms in Article 1 does not provide an unconditional license for free flow but rather ties UNESCO's mandate to the general principles of international law as laid down in the UN Charter. In fact, here we have a textbook example of the notion of positive freedom – free flow serving other objectives (freedom *for*) instead of being an end in itself as the notion of negative freedom is understood (freedom *from*).

Reading UNESCO's contemporary presentations of itself in the CI sector (such as the one above) leads one to wonder whether the Constitution has been forgotten since 1990 – the end of the Cold War. To put it more bluntly, UNESCO seems to have departed from its legitimate constitutional mandate by elevating freedom of information as a top priority with a self-serving objective. For example, under the theme Freedom of Expression the text reads: "UNESCO promotes freedom of expression and freedom of the press as a basic human right..." Here and elsewhere "press" has appeared as the subject of freedom – without it being mentioned anywhere in the Constitution or other sources of international law (more on this in the next case).

To be fair to the current actors at UNESCO, one should note that the web page "About the CI Sector" has this subtitle: "Empowering people through the free flow of ideas by word and image, and by access to information and knowledge." Here free flow is at least tied to people and their emancipation, but the main constitutional points of peace and security as well as mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples are conspicuously absent from practically all presentations and programs. Of course the blame lies not only with the Secretariat headed by the Director-General but ultimately with the Member States with whose blessing the organization operates.

It is not difficult to find an explanation for UNESCO's departure from its constitutional line. It wanted to get rid of its reputation as a fellow traveler of the socialist and authoritarian regimes which had developed in the West along with the anti-imperialist drive in the 1970s and which had given rise to such concepts as New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO, known in the Latin languages by the acronym NOMIC). By adopting freedom as a leading theme especially in the media field, UNESCO draws a line at the world before 1990 – with its division into three worlds, including the socialist bloc of the East and the Non-Aligned Movement of the South. Entering a new millennium, UNESCO presents itself as freed from the burdens of the past. Psychologically this may be understandable as treatment of a trauma,

but it is fatally wrong in terms of UNESCO's constitutional status and role in international politics. By wrapping its IC sector in a freedom banner, UNESCO has dissociated itself from its basic mandate and supported the myth that its mission is unconditional free flow. To use an old metaphor: the baby has been thrown out with the bath water.

In order to understand what has happened at UNESCO, one needs to recall the history of the anti-imperialist drive of the 1970s (NORDENSTRENG 1984; 1999)³. It was part and parcel of a more fundamental development in the global arena with landmarks such as the UN resolutions on a New International Economic Order and equating Zionism with racism. During this radical period in international politics, UNESCO made history by producing the Mass Media Declaration, the MacBride Report and setting up the International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC). It is remarkable that all this was done by diplomatic consensus, although the "great media debate" in the 1970s went through three war-like stages of (1) decolonization offensive, (2) western counterattack, and (3) truce (NORDENSTRENG, 2005: 45).

What followed after these stages is crucial for understanding UNESCO's traumatic relationship to freedom of information:

However, the balance of global forces changed drastically soon after the MacBride Report was issued. Ronald Reagan's advent as President in early 1981 turned the USA from multilateralism to a unilateral employment of power politics, with a relative weakening of the USSR and the Non-Aligned Movement. The truce of the 1970s was followed by a new Western offensive in the 1980s. At this stage all the elements of compromise which were earlier regarded as valuable and honorable went suddenly out of fashion and even turned into liability risks. Thus M'Bow lost his job and NWICO became a taboo at UNESCO.

In a broader context of Western politics, UNESCO was regarded as a burden, whereby the Reagan administration decided that the USA would leave the Organization, followed by Thatcher's UK. Here it is important to realize that the American and British departures from UNESCO were not caused primarily by NWICO, MacBride or M'Bow but that the true reason was a strategic shift away from multilateralism – a warning to the international community that leading Western powers would not be outvoted by the majority of the world's nations. As expressed by a former Assistant Secretary of State in the Carter administration, "UNESCO was the Grenada of the United Nations" – a relatively small target to demonstrate what could be done on a larger scale if the interests of the big power were not respected.

In this light, UNESCO's record after M'Bow – both in communication and other sectors – is far from honorable. The Organization not only stopped following the strategic line of the South and the East but it did its utmost to appeal to the West – not the least to the non-member state USA – for example by attempting to censor a book exposing UNESCO's U-turn in media policy (Preston & al. 1989). Part of this culture of the 1980s was the fact that MacBride Report, like NWICO, was regarded as politically incorrect. (NORDENSTRENG, 2005: 46)

Another quote from the author's earlier publication illuminates the role of the State regarding freedom of information:

At the height of the NWICO battles in the 1980s, the coalition dominated by U.S. press proprietors and led by the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC) engineered "The Declaration of Talloires," which advocated the U.S. First Amendment notion of media freedom and attacked the NWICO for ostensibly advocating State control of the media. This call by the self-proclaimed voice of the "independent news media" was endorsed by a letter from President Ronald Reagan, the highest representative of the U.S. State (Nordenstreng 1999: 257). The Talloires group went around proudly quoting the letter, without seeing the paradox: the State actively advocating a denial of State involvement in the media.

The ideological struggles around NWICO exposed the central role that the concept of the State occupies in media policies, both national and international. Given the libertarian bias held even by many leftist media intellectuals, it was relatively easy to construct the big lie that NWICO promoted State control (such as licensing of journalists). A demonized notion of the State traveled so well that many professional and academic experts failed to see that while opposing State control and supporting media freedom they were in fact subscribing to a corporate initiative, conspicuously directed against democratic interests.

True, the situation was quite complicated in the international arena, with the Soviet-led socialist countries as well as several less democratic Third World countries supporting the NWICO. Later, when Eastern European countries became fellow travelers of Western powers, the balance also shifted at UNESCO, which switched from advocating to opposing NWICO. This reversal reveals another paradox: The United States had left UNESCO, citing among other reasons its displeasure with NWICO as an instrument of State control of the media, while in the post-NWICO period the United States, formally a non-member, gained significant influence over UNESCO's liberal media policies, mainly through the surrogate body WPFC. (NORDENSTRENG, 2001: 159)

In a still broader historical context, UNESCO's current approach to the free flow of information means a return to what Americans had been trying to push onto its agenda since its foundation in 1945 and which largely figured in its communication policies in the 1950s and 1960s – regardless of what the Constitution said. As Herbert Schiller (1976) has shown, the American doctrine of free flow of information has an ironic prehistory between the two World Wars when the Associated Press (AP) used it as an argument in encroaching upon the territories of the British and French news agencies Reuters and Havas (COOPER, 1942). Referring to American expansionism, the British *Economist* noted that Kent Cooper, the executive manager of AP, “like most big business executives, experiences a peculiar moral glow in finding that his idea of freedom coincides with his commercial advantage” (SCHILLER, 1976: 29). In the early 1940s the American Society of Newspaper Editors proposed to the U.S. Congress that it support “world freedom of information and unrestricted communications of news throughout the world” (Ibid.: 31). This lobbying was successful to the point that John Foster Dulles, one of the chief architects of the American Cold War policy after 1945, declared: “If I were to be granted one point in foreign policy and no other, I would make it the free flow of information” (Ibid.: 30).

Despite initial hesitancy among the European allies, the doctrine of free flow of information became indeed a central element in the common Western arsenal of the Cold War. It found its way also to UNESCO, although as shown by Joseph Mehan (1981), the Americans did not succeed in totally turning the Organization into an instrument of the Cold War (NORDENSTRENG, 1984: 6-7). A muted but still noticeable line in keeping with the Western free flow doctrine continued until the 1970s, when it was challenged by what was characterized above as an anti-imperialist drive. Schiller wrote his disarming historical review at this time in the middle of the 1970s, suggesting that the American hegemony was on the decline, giving a way to a more balanced notion of free flow whereby the developing world would also have its fair share. Today we can say that Schiller was wrong and American domination is back again.

The lesson from this history is, firstly, that free flow of information has never been a neutral and ecumenical concept but rather a tactical argument in socio-economic and ideological struggles. Secondly, the constitutional mission of UNESCO, based on a text drafted in the idealistic spirit towards the end of World War II, was contradictory to the free flow doctrine created in the USA and turned into a Cold War instrument. Thirdly, by following the free flow doctrine, UNESCO deviated from its constitutional mission until the 1970s when the Mass Media Declaration, the MacBride Commission and

NWICO brought it back on track. As we know, this turn back to basics was only short-lived and was derailed by political shifts in the world.

In any case we may say with just a little exaggeration that in the media field UNESCO has never been closer to its constitutional mission than during the 1970s. After all, the concept of NWICO is more compatible with UNESCO's Constitution than is the free flow doctrine.

While these are important lessons, there is no need to set up a Truth Commission to examine the past. Today we can take a fresh look at the future provided by the World Summit on Information in the Information Society (PADOVANI & NORDENSTRENG, 2005).

Press freedom and the universal declaration of human rights

While the preceding two cases took us on lengthy historical excursions, the present one is fairly simple and straightforward: the subject of human rights and fundamental freedoms is not an institution called the press or the media but an individual human being. Therefore the phrase "freedom of the press" is misleading as it includes an elusive idea that the privilege of human rights is extended to the media, its owners and managers, rather than to the people for expressing their voice through the media.

Let us again read carefully the famous Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The subject of the right here is "everyone" in the sense of "all human beings" (phrase is used in Article 1). Beyond everyone appears only "a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized", as stipulated in Article 28 (introducing the concept of "international order", which later in the NWICO debate was rejected by the western press freedom advocates). Nothing in Article 19 suggests that the institution of the press has any ownership right to this freedom. And the word "media" appears as an open means for the use of "everyone" to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.

In fact, Article 19 stipulates that the media should be in the service, if not the ownership, of the people. It is a myth that the press and the media themselves enjoy protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this respect some human rights lobbies, including that bearing the name of

Article 19, have pursued doubtful policies in favor of media proprietors and against individual people.

Pedantically speaking, Article 19 introduces the right of “freedom of opinion and expression” – not “freedom of information” or “free flow of information”, let alone “press freedom”. Moreover, it is important to remember that the Universal Declaration of 1948 does not constitute proper international law; this is established only by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted 18 years later. And that document adds to the definition of the Declaration’s Article 19 the provision that the exercise of this right “carries with it special duties and responsibilities” and may be subject to certain restrictions under specific circumstances to be provided by law.

Accordingly, the legal form of what is referred to as “press freedom” includes a concept of freedom which is far from the unconditional license to do anything, as is typically suggested by media proprietors and also many journalists. As in the preceding two cases, the concept of freedom under human rights turns out to be quite qualified and leads us to be wary of the conventional myth.

All this is an old lesson which, however, has largely been forgotten. It is important to relearn this lesson, with teaching materials such as those provided by Nordenstreng and Schiller in 1979 (Part 3 with chapters by Eek, Gross and Whitton), Nordenstreng in 1984 (Part 2 on international law and the mass media) and Hamelink in 1994. Moreover, here is a challenge for journalism educators to prepare an easy-to-read and up-to-date presentation of the true idea of freedom within the context of international law and politics⁴.

Media freedom and the millennium declaration

A largely overlooked paragraph in the Millennium Declaration of September 18, 2000, under “V. Human rights, democracy and good governance” resolves:

To ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information.

Here finally we have an authoritative document of the international community – although only a Declaration, not a text of proper international law – which speaks literally about the freedom of the media. But how? It is not an abstract freedom granted to the media but a call or even an obligation

to perform a certain role in society and to assist people to gain access to information. Once more, it is a concept of positive freedom to perform a certain role – not a negative freedom from restraint to do whatever the media may want to do. The parameters for the “essential role” are not specified, but the Millennium Declaration leaves little doubt about what is meant under the preceding four chapters “Values and principles”, “Peace, security and disarmament”, “Development and poverty eradication”, and “Protecting our common environment”.

Consequently, we can trace a centuries-long historical line from the early modern age to the post-modern world, with a surprisingly coherent idea of freedom of information. In this context, liberalism is not a partisan ideology hijacked by U.S. diplomacy but a balanced philosophy which is far from outdated. And despite political turns at UNESCO, the idealism written into its Constitution is far from a dead letter. Although the new millennium faces ever greater problems in the world, there is still cause for optimism.

Conclusion

The myths covered in this article suggest that freedom applied to the media is a highly problematic concept. Moreover, it is a conspicuously ideological concept – especially when understood to be simple and apolitical.

While the exposure of the myths above has been somewhat polemic and one-sided, it does not suggest that the idea of freedom – in general or applied to the media – should be undermined or subjected to dogmatic doubt. On the contrary, freedom of thought, of expression and of the media is cherished as a vital element in the lives of individuals as well as societies. Yet, the concept of freedom should not be elevated beyond critical assessment and debate, as often is done, especially by press freedom advocates, who tend to mystify the notion of freedom and stigmatize others questioning the absolutist nature of (press) freedom⁵.

It is precisely because of its great value that freedom should not be allowed to degenerate into an ideological instrument, as has too often been the case. The very phrase “press freedom” serves as a warning example.

In order to disprove the old myths and to avoid the emergence of new ones, it is important that freedom, and the lack of it, remain in constant debate – not only as a reality but also as an idea, in the spirit of Milton and Mill.

NOTES

- 1 This case is based on a doctoral dissertation on John Stuart Mill and his relation to the libertarian theory of the press just completed by Jorma Mäntylä at the University of Tampere. It is published in Finnish; a summarizing article in English is in preparation.
- 2 No doubt some of these true believers from the Cold War era refer to my past as President of IOJ, which included the national unions of journalists from the USSR and other socialist countries (but also most developing countries including Brazil's FENAJ). I have indeed made this point about liberty consistently since the 1970s and at that time of East-West confrontation the western advocates of press freedom used to argue that as head of that "Communist World Organization" I was only trying to attack western values in defense of the system which was allegedly not free. In this respect I was placed in the same basket with Armand Mattelart, Herbert Schiller and other "useful fools" (Lenin's phrase for progressive friends in the West). This cheap argument no longer applies in the contemporary world and the field is now open for a more frank and serious intellectual encounter.
- 3 A small but still significant chapter in this history was the study on television program structures around the world and the import and export flows related to them. Initiated by me when I was still head of research at the Finnish Broadcasting Company in 1970-71 and carried out together with my research assistant, Tapio Varis, in 1971-73, it was supported by UNESCO, which commissioned my new base at the University of Tampere to hold a symposium in May 1973 to discuss the results of the study. The symposium was addressed by Finland's then President, Urho Kekkonen, who criticized the western notion of (anti-Communist) freedom and who used the term "information imperialism" in referring to the imbalance of media flows in the world. This speech as well as the summary results of the study and symposium were published by UNESCO in several languages as an issue which became a bestseller in its series Reports and Papers in Mass Communication (NORDENSTRENG and VARIS, 1974). What began as a small and technical study grew into a classic in the "great media debate".
- 4 Of course this should have been done long ago by UNESCO. However, its activity relating to the media and journalism has systematically avoided putting on its agenda matters of principle such as freedom, and it has rather affirmatively followed the political trends of the day. A new platform also for this challenge will be provided by the

first World Journalism Education Congress in Singapore in June 2007 (<http://www.amic-wjec.org/>).

- 5 The latest confrontation in this regard developed around the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published in Denmark. An international study of this case was carried out at the University of Tampere, including 14 national reviews of the way freedom of speech was understood in professional and journalistic debates (KUNELIUS & al., 2007). In a Finnish debate stimulated by this study, its main researcher, Professor Kunelius, has been attacked by several journalists after he used the term “fundamentalist” to characterize an extreme libertarian view (one in a typology of four) whereby the publishing of the cartoons can under no circumstances be denied on grounds of principle. Kunelius pointed out that such a fundamentalist version of freedom places itself beyond reflection and thus turns against the idea of liberty as an open and tolerant approach. His opponents on their part accuse him and his fellow researchers of condoning censorship. Obviously the same kind of debate – or a dialogue of the deaf – takes place also elsewhere with stimuli such as the Danish cartoons.

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