

# THE VALUE OF DISSENT



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A CRM PUBLICATION

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

The theme of this series is that progress depends on the free exchange of conflicting ideas. Not merely good government, but the development of civilisation — cultural, scientific, economic — requires this.

Conceived of in response to a specific situation, it was found that the first in the series, which was distributed internationally, struck an important chord in many societies. The idea for this project originated in the context of the appalling violence which has disfigured Sri Lanka in recent years, accompanied by a terrifying rise of intolerance. In this background, CRM identified as a priority the need to promote understanding of not only the right to dissent, but also the intrinsic value of dissent. This simple truth has to be reaffirmed and illustrated. CRM is therefore compiling and translating a variety of material relevant to this theme, including the writings of political scientists, philosophers and other thinkers; legal decisions; scientific case histories; literature and drama inspired by or depicting the conflict between individual conscience and established forces; and other interesting examples of individual dissent, including commentary on current issues.

Threats to the free exchange of ideas certainly do not come from governments alone. They can and do come from other sources too; from various social and political groups, from communal and individual attitudes, even from majority public opinion. Indeed, the suppression of opposing views by the state is often with the support of society at large; governments in many ways reflect society's prejudices. However — and this is the point of the series — intolerance from whatever source is dangerous to society, and must be identified and opposed.

Publication is in English, Sinhala and Tamil. The material is not now being brought out in any particular grouping or sequence; later it may be reorganised into a more orderly collection. Compilation is a continuing process and it is hoped that this publication will stimulate suggestions and contributions from readers.

A fuller description of this project is given in *The Value of Dissent* No. 1. See inside back cover.

# **THE VALUE OF DISSENT**

THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF SWEDEN

# THE VALUE OF DISSENT

3

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OF SRI LANKA

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*left, Sophie Scholl; right, Aung San Suu Kyi*

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THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF SWITZERLAND



## Introduction

One of the latest fashions in suppressing dissent is to claim that the right to dissent is a purely Western value. It is therefore out of place in the rest of the world. Worse than that, dissenters are agents of western powers and traitors to their own societies.

This argument has been used mainly by certain Asian governments who object to international scrutiny of their human rights records. But it is by no means an argument reserved exclusively for state officials. There are many contexts in which proponents of a particular ideology, religious belief or economic model resort to this type of attack on those who disagree with them. What begins as frustration at their inability to impose their own ideas on others, transforms itself into a blind objection to debate and all too often leads to torture and terror mercilessly inflicted on all dissenters, both real and imagined. All this is insidiously justified in the name of protecting local culture and traditions.

*The Value of Dissent* gives the lie to this dangerous mythology. The idea that dissent has different social consequences in the West is palpably false. Whether it has been in the fields of science, art or politics, those who have dissented in the West have faced social isolation, criticism from their professional colleagues and often paid for their beliefs with their lives. The persecution of Galileo Galilei, described in *The Value of Dissent 2* stands as an eloquent symbol for all those who have been subjected to extreme pressures in order to make them conform to the accepted beliefs of their day. The moving story of the young Hans and Sophie Scholl, who were executed for their defiance of the Nazis in Germany, is a more recent example of the heights of courage that the human spirit can reach in the face of overwhelming odds.

The second truth about dissent which is emerging from the stories and texts in this series is that in so many cases, regardless of the society in which the events took place,

it has been exercise of dissent that eventually led to major breakthroughs in the advance of knowledge. So what appears to begin as an act of individualistic questioning of orthodoxy can in fact end up bringing benefits not only to the immediate society of the day, but to humanity as a whole. The contribution of Dr John Snow to halting the spread of cholera, recorded in *The Value of Dissent 1*, is impressive testament to that. In a future issue we will publish an article on the value of non conformism in science. Writing especially for this series, the author — a distinguished virologist — draws examples from the field of genetics.

Study of the rich history and cultures of Asia reveals the same human process of questioning, opposition and eventual change unfolding — and the importance attached to the integrity of those who motivate that process. Indeed, our first edition highlighted the insistence of Gautama Buddha over 2,500 years ago on the primacy of the individual's responsibility for determining what to believe. Much more recently, on the occasion of the World Conference on Human Rights, convened by the United Nations in Vienna in June 1993, the XIVth Dalai Lama of Tibet took issue publicly with the notion that the exercise of human rights such as the right to dissent is inappropriate in the nations of Asia:

"Recently some Asian governments have contended that the standards of human rights laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are those advocated by the West and cannot be applied to Asia and other parts of the Third World because of differences in culture and differences in social and economic development. I do not share this view and I am convinced that the majority of Asian people do not support this view either, for it is the inherent nature of all human beings to yearn for freedom, equality and dignity... Diversity and traditions can never justify the violation of human rights. Thus discrim-

ination of persons from a different race, of women, and of weaker sections of society may be traditional in some regions, but if they are inconsistent with universally recognized human rights, these forms of behaviour must change. The universal principles of equality of all human beings must take precedence”.

In keeping with the distinguished tradition of all dissent, his final words encapsulate two fundamental notions. First, that once social customs are perceived as outdated and unjust, it is society itself that must inevitably re-examine the validity of its customs rather than silence its critics. Second, recognition of the equality of all human beings — including therefore their perceptions — makes it unreasonable for any one individual or group to claim an irrevocable monopoly on truth.

The strongest refutation of the claim that human rights is a Western concept alien to Asian tradition has, however, probably been made by that great patriot Aung San Suu Kyi, who is featured elsewhere in this issue. In her essay *In Quest of Democracy* she writes:

“It was predictable that as soon as the issue of human rights became an integral part of the movement for democracy the official media should start ridiculing and condemning the whole concept of human rights, dubbing it a western artefact alien to traditional values. It was also ironic — Buddhism, the foundation of traditional Burmese culture, places the greatest value on man, who alone of all beings can achieve the supreme state of Buddhahood. Each man has in him the potential to realize the truth through his own will and endeavour and to help others to realize it. Human life therefore is infinitely precious”.

Putting her finger unerringly on the real reason why

governments resort to this argument, Suu Kyi continues:

"But despotic governments do not recognize the precious human component of the state, seeing its citizens only as a faceless, mindless — and helpless — mass to be manipulated at will. It is as though people were incidental to a nation rather than its very life-blood. Patriotism, which should be the vital love and care of a people for their land, is debased into a smokescreen of hysteria to hide the injustices of authoritarian rulers who define the interests of the state in terms of their own limited interests. The official creed is required to be accepted with an unquestioning faith more in keeping with orthodox tenets of the biblical religions which have held sway in the West than with the more liberal Buddhist attitude.... If ideas and beliefs are to be denied validity outside the geographical and cultural bounds of their origin, Buddhism would be confined to north India, Christianity to a narrow tract in the Middle East and Islam to Arabia".

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*Hans Scholl (1918 - 1943)  
and Sophie Scholl (1921 - 1943)*

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WHITE ROSE LEAFLETS

*The work of the White Rose is an inspiring example of courageous dissent in the face of all-powerful forces of evil. It took place as a response to the ruthless totalitarianism of Nazi Germany. A brief account of the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany, which forms the background to the work of this brave group of men and women, is given at the end.*

*The "White Rose" was a small anti-militarist group of young Germans, and was active in 1942 and 1943. One of its most eloquent members was Sophie Scholl, whose brother Hans started the "White Rose" with friends and who herself was only 18 when the Second World War started in 1939. "One has to do something", she said, "or else be guilty".*

*The "White Rose" distributed six leaflets in cities throughout Germany. Hans and Sophie Scholl were caught distributing the last leaflet to students in Munich University. They did not deny their actions, and were beheaded for treason.*

*The first leaflet begins:*

Nothing is so unworthy of a civilized nation as allowing itself to be "governed" without opposition by an irresponsible clique that has yielded to base instinct. It is certain that today every honest German is ashamed of his government. Who among us has any conception of the dimensions of shame that will befall us and our children when one day the veil has fallen from our eyes and the most horrible of crimes — crimes that infinitely outdistance every human measure — reach the light of day? If the German people are already so corrupted and spiritually crushed that they do not raise a hand, frivolously trusting in a questionable faith in lawful order in history; if they surrender man's highest principle, that which raises him above all other



Hans Scholl, born 22.9.1919,  
arrested 18.2.1943, executed  
22.2.1943



Sophie Scholl, born 9.5.1921,  
arrested 18.2.1943, executed  
22.2.1943



Willi Graf, born 2.1.1918,  
arrested 18.2.1943, executed  
12.10.1943



Kurt Huber, born 24.10.1893,  
arrested 27.2.1943, executed  
13.7.1943

God's creatures, his free will; if they abandon the will to take decisive action and turn the wheel of history and thus subject it to their own rational decision; if they are so devoid of all individuality, have already gone so far along the road toward turning into a spiritless and cowardly mass — then, yes, they deserve their downfall. If everyone waits until the other man makes a start, the messengers of avenging Nemesis will come steadily closer; then even the last victim will have been cast senselessly into the maw of the insatiable demon. Offer passive resistance — *resistance* — wherever you may be, forestall the spread of this atheistic war machine before it is too late, before the last cities, like Cologne, have been reduced to rubble, and before the nation's last young man has given his blood on some battlefield for the *hubris* of a sub-human. Do not forget that every people deserves the regime it is willing to endure.

*The leaflet finished with a quotation from the great German poet Friedrich Schiller:*

The state is never an end in itself; it is important only as a condition under which the purpose of humanity can be attained, and this purpose is none other than the development of all humanity's powers, its progress and improvement. If a state prevents the development of the capacities which reside in man, if it interferes with the progress of the human spirit, then it is reprehensible and injurious, no matter how excellently devised, how perfect in its own way. Its very permanence in that case amounts more to a reproach than to a basis for fame; it becomes a prolonged evil, and the longer it endures, the more harmful it is....

Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805)

The lawgiving of Lycurgus and Solon

*The third leaflet faced the difficult question of practical resistance to Nazism:*

Every individual human being has a claim to a useful and just state, a state which secures the freedom

of the individual as well as the good of the whole... But our present "state" is the dictatorship of evil... Many, perhaps most of the readers of these leaflets do not see clearly how they can practise an effective opposition. They do not see any avenues open to them. We want to try to show them that everyone is in a position to contribute to the overthrow of this system. It is not possible through solitary withdrawal, in the manner of embittered hermits, to prepare the ground for the overturn of this "government" or bring about the revolution at the earliest possible moment. No, it can be done only by the co-operation of many convinced, energetic people — people who are agreed as to the means they must use to attain their goal. We have no great number of choices as to these means. The only one available is passive resistance... At all points we must oppose National Socialism... We must soon bring this monster of a state to an end. A victory of fascist Germany in this war would have immeasurable, frightful consequences.

*The fourth leaflet concluded with these words:*

We are your bad conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in peace!

*The fifth looked forward to Nazi defeat and a free future:*

Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the protection of individual citizens from the arbitrary will of criminal regimes of violence — these will be the bases of the New Europe. Support the resistance. Distribute the leaflets!

*Thirty years after her brother and sister had been put to death, Inge Aicher-Scholl reflected:* Theirs were the voices of people who were not ready to delegate their right of opinion to organizations which did not wholly represent their views... One characteristic of the German resistance



was that it gave the appearance of having to oppose its own state, its people, and that people's interests. For many, this entailed a difficult conflict, through which they struggled with difficulty. But not so for my brother and sister; for them no dilemma existed... The defence of common humanity everywhere had to be raised above the interest of the nation... In a war against the individual, against people different from ourselves, and against dissident minorities, the resisters had to show their solidarity with these isolated individuals.



*A friendship dating back to schooldays. Christoph Probst, born 6.11.1919, arrested 19.2.1943, executed 22.2.1943, and Alexander Schmorell, born 16.9.1917, arrested 24.2.1943, executed 13.7.1943*

THE RISE OF NAZI GERMANY  
a background note to the White Rose leaflets

After the German Empire was defeated at the end of the World War of 1914-1918 the Weimar Republic was set up, and the first session of the National Assembly took place on 6 February 1918. But this new Republic immediately ran into difficulties: the armistice which had been requested so urgently by the German General Staff in September 1918 in order to avoid total collapse of the western front, was blamed not on the generals who were responsible for the disastrous consequences of the war, but on the democratic politicians who were now trying to set up a new government. These politicians found themselves in the unenviable situation of having to sign the Treaty of Versailles, thus giving the middle class nationalists and monarchist feudalists of whom there were plenty left after the 1918 November revolution, the opportunity to blame them "for stabbing the undefeated German Armed Forces in the back". They were held responsible for the military defeat.

The treaty of Versailles exacted a harsh penalty of the defeated Germany: ceding of German territory and populations, the occupation of the Rhineland and enormous reparation payments. The disastrous inflation which followed these measures impoverished a large section of the German middle class who construed all these measures as designed to destroy Germany and the Germans. Then, in 1929 the Great Depression hit Germany. As a result there were 4.4 million unemployed in 1930 and more than 6 million in 1933.

Because democracy was, so to speak, imposed from the outside, i.e. by the victorious Allies, the German population was not prepared to accept it. Moreover, there was a historical lack of democratic political culture and understanding: according to the ethics of the old Empire politics amounted to veneration of the Kaiser, to an unswerving patriotism and loyalty to the country and to an unquestioning acceptance that the individual and his wishes were unimportant in the face of an all-powerful government. There were few politicians in the Weimar Republic who were true democrats, and those there were had little experience and were divided among themselves. They were opposed by the conservatives, the National Socialists and by the Communists. The Weimar Republic collapsed.

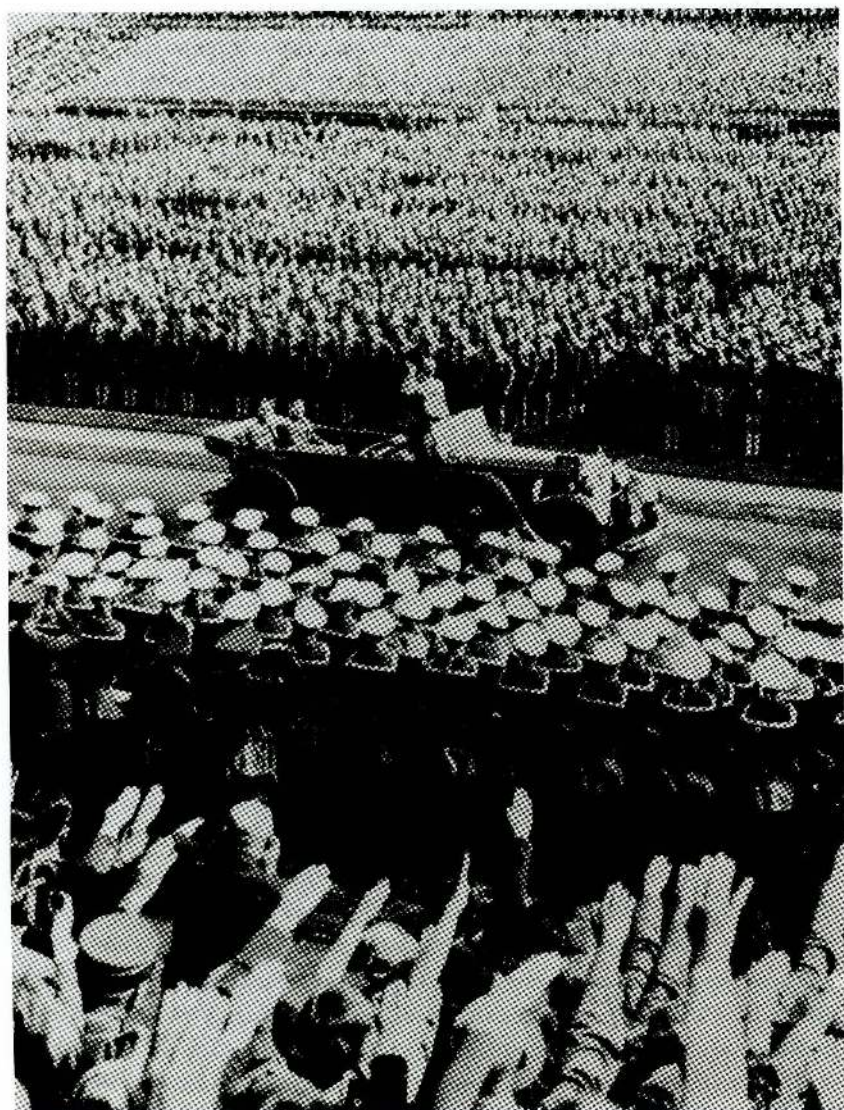
This was the background to the rise of Hitler who had been leader of the National Socialist Workers Party since 1921. He promoted a programme

that suited the mood of the moment, promised work as well as revenge, a restoration of national grandeur as well as settling of accounts with those whom he blamed for the defeat in World War I. He had gained a great following, and in January 1933 President Hindenburg, in spite of his better judgment, was persuaded to name Hitler Chancellor. This was the moment when dictatorship began. Hitler was able to infiltrate many important posts with his own henchmen, and he did not hesitate to kill by whatever means available a number of his political opponents.

Hitler became Chancellor on 30 January 1933. In February 1933 the German Parliament, the Reichstag, caught fire one night, and although it is now an accepted fact that this massive conflagration was a plot hatched between Hitler, Goering and Goebbels, the news media immediately blamed the Communists. A decree was passed to punish the perpetrators: it gave the Nazis the right by law to restrict personal liberty, free expression of opinion and freedom of the press, to arrest whomever they wanted, and to impose the death penalty for a number of new offences.

Parliamentary democracy ceased to exist in Germany after 23 March 1933. This was not done by an act of force, but by perfectly legal procedures: through the so-called "Enabling Act" Parliament renounced its participation in law-making. The Act had five paragraphs which took the power of legislation, control of the budget and treaties with foreign countries away from Parliament. Moreover, the Chancellor, i.e. Hitler, would draft all laws himself, and provision was made for these laws to "deviate" from the Constitution. The infamous Act came before Parliament, was voted upon and accepted by Parliament. In other words, Parliament turned over its authority to Hitler, and by this committed suicide. Hitler, had "legally" obtained sanction to bring the whole country under the heel of the Nazis. The Germans could not blame any one but themselves.

The decree passed after the burning of the Reichstag together with the Enabling Act formed the basis of absolute power on which Hitler built his regime. Terror and violence accompanied the misuse of the Constitution. Political foes and Jews were bullied, beaten, locked up and frequently killed. By 1934 the first Concentration Camp was already established and had been taken over by the SS, Hitler's personal bodyguards, (the 'Schutzstaffeln' or Protective Formations). The head of this elite party guard was Heinrich Himmler, and he made of the organisation virtually a state within a state. It included the infamous Gestapo, or secret police, which ultimately became the hub of the entire organisation of deportations and massacres.



*Hitler at a party youth rally at Nuremberg in 1935*

On 2 August 1934 President Hindenburg died and three hours later it was announced that Hitler had taken over the powers of Head of State and Chief of Staff of the army. The title of President was abolished - Hitler would be known as Führer and Reichskanzler. He bound the Army to obedience by an oath he hastily extracted from them - an oath of allegiance, not to Germany, nor to Germany's Constitution, but to himself, Hitler.

Hindenburg had been the last obstacle in Hitler's way. Now there was no one to dispute his authority, and those that might were blinded by his promises. His dictatorship was complete and he could rule the people as the most powerful and ruthless autocrat the world has ever known.

Anne Ranasinghe

An extract from the essay *Who Can Guess the Moment* published in *At What Dark Point*. First edition 1991, reprint with updates August 1996.

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## Bertrand Russell (1872 - 1970)

### FREE THOUGHT AND OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA (1922)

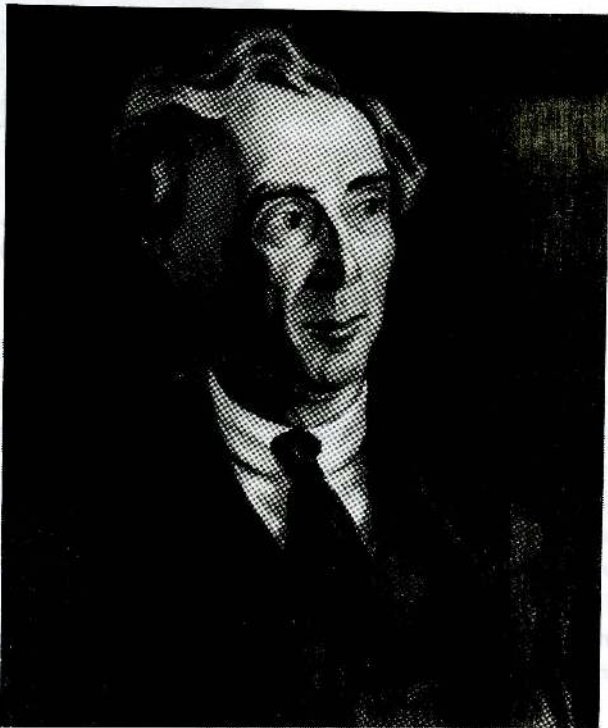
*Bertrand Russell is certainly the best-known English philosopher of the twentieth century, though his worldwide fame rests not on his pure philosophical work but rather on his more accessible writings on an enormous range of political, ethical and social matters, from marriage to nuclear weapons. He was famous too for his activism, from his imprisonment for conscientious objection during the First World War, to his participation, even into his nineties, in anti-nuclear marches.*

*Among his many considerations of liberty is a speech on freedom of thought in 1922. Russell addressed two connected aspects of this subject which are vital to a democracy, and are still too rarely considered. First, there are what he calls the "economic penalties" that can be imposed as a more discreet, less visible form of coercion against people who use their legal rights to free expression. Secondly, there is the necessity for "equality of opportunity among opinions", if any society is truly to enjoy freedom of expression.*

Whatever or whoever is "free", *Russell begins*, is not subject to some external compulsion, and to be precise we ought to say what this kind of compulsion is. Thus thought is "free" when it is free from certain kinds of outward control which are often present. Some of these kinds of control, which must be absent if thought is to be "free", are obvious, but others are more subtle and elusive. ...

Thought is not "free" when legal penalties are incurred by the holding or not holding of certain opinions, or by giving expression to one's belief or lack of belief on certain matters. Very few countries in the world have as yet even this elementary kind of freedom. Legal penalties are, however, in the modern world, the least of the obstacles to freedom of thought. The two great obstacles are economic penalties and distortion of evidence. It is clear that thought is not

free if the profession of certain opinions makes it impossible to earn a living. It is clear also that thought is not free if all the arguments on one side of a controversy are perpetually presented as attractively as possible, while the arguments on the other side can only be discovered by diligent search.... We may say that thought is free when it is exposed to free competition among beliefs - i.e., when all beliefs are able to state their case, and no legal or pecuniary advantages or disadvantages attach to beliefs. This is an ideal which, for various reasons, can never be fully attained. But it is possible to approach very much nearer to it than we do at present.....



Bertrand Russell, *Portrait by Roger Fry, 1923*

## Aung San Suu Kyi

### FREEDOM FROM FEAR

*Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1991. She has never been able to receive it. She has been under house arrest by order of her country's military rulers since 1989. Aung San Suu Kyi is the former leader of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar, previously known as Burma. She was elected to power in 1988 in a landslide popular vote, but was never able to take office because the military intervened, nullifying the results of the election and imposing rule by junta on the country.*



*Aung San Suu Kyi  
One of the thousand public addresses  
given in 1988-9*

*On 10 December 1990, student demonstrations erupted in many universities in Myanmar, defying bans on opposition political activities. The demonstrators demanded the release of Suu Kyi. The junta reacted by closing down all universities and colleges throughout the country.*

*The following extracts come from two essays by Suu Kyi. In the first, entitled, "Freedom from Fear", she refers to Jawaharlal Nehru's assessment, that one of the greatest achievements of Mahatma Gandhi was his instillation of courage in the people of India: "The greatest gift for an individual or nation...was abhaya, fearlessness, not merely bodily courage but absence of fear from the mind".*

*It is this theme of fearlessness — and the consequences of fear — that Suu Kyi picks up as she calls for the need*



*to dissent from and to challenge the very foundations of a social order which denies the existence of human rights.*

It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it. Most Burmese are familiar with the four *a-gati*, the four kinds of corruption. *Chanda-gati*, corruption induced by desire, is deviation from the right path in pursuit of bribes or for the sake of those one loves. *Dosa-gati*, is taking the wrong path to spite those against whom one bears ill will, and *moga-gati* is aberration due to ignorance. But perhaps the worst of the four is *bhaya-gati*, for not only does bhaya, fear, stifle and slowly destroy all sense of right and wrong, it so often lies at the root of the other three kinds of corruption.

Just as *chanda-gati*, when not the result of sheer avarice, can be caused by fear of want or fear of losing the good will of those one loves, so fear of being surpassed, humiliated or injured in some way can provide the impetus for ill will. And it would be difficult to dispel ignorance unless there is freedom to pursue the truth unfettered by fear. With so close a relationship between fear and corruption there is little wonder that in any society where fear is rife, corruption in all forms becomes deeply entrenched.

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The effort necessary to remain uncorrupted in an environment where fear is an integral part of everyday existence is not immediately apparent to those fortunate enough to live in states governed by the rule of law. Just laws do not merely prevent corruption by meting out impartial punishment to offenders. They also help to create a society in which people can fulfil basic requirements necessary for the preservation of human dignity without recourse to corrupt practices. Where there are no such laws, the burden of upholding the principles of justice and common decency falls on the ordinary people. It is the cumulative effect of their sustained effort and steady endurance which will

change a nation where reason and conscience are warped by fear into one where legal rules exist to promote man's desire for harmony and justice while restraining the less desirable, destructive traits in his nature.

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Within a system which denies the existence of basic human rights, fear tends to be the order of the day. Fear of imprisonment, fear of torture, fear of death, fear of losing friends, family, property or means of livelihood, fear of poverty, fear of isolation, fear of failure. A most insidious form of fear is that which masquerades as common sense or even wisdom, condemning as foolish, reckless, insignificant or futile the small, daily acts of courage which help to preserve man's self-respect and inherent human dignity. It is not easy for people conditioned by fear under the iron rule of the principle that might is right to free themselves from the enervating miasma of fear. Yet even under the most crushing state machinery courage rises up again and again, for fear is not the natural state of civilized man.

The wellspring of courage and endurance in the face of unbridled power is generally a firm belief in the sanctity of ethical principles combined with a historical sense that despite all setbacks the condition of man is set on an ultimate course of both spiritual and material advancement. It is his capacity for self-improvement and self-redemption which most distinguishes man from the mere brute. At the root of human responsibility is the concept of perfection, the urge to achieve it, the intelligence to find a path towards it, and the will to follow the path, if not to the end at least the distance needed to rise above individual limitations and environmental impediments. It is man's vision of a world fit for rational, civilized humanity which leads him to dare and to suffer to build societies free from want and fear. Concepts such as truth, justice and compassion cannot be dismissed as trite when these are often the only bulwarks which stand against ruthless power.

*In the second essay from which we quote, "In Quest of Democracy", she reflects on the inter-relation between change, democracy, violence and dissent.*

Revolutions generally reflect the irresistible impulse for necessary changes which have been held back by official policies or retarded by social apathy. The institutions and practices of democracy provide ways and means by which such changes could be effected without recourse to violence. But change is anathema to authoritarianism, which will tolerate no deviation from rigid policies. Democracy acknowledges the right to differ as well as the duty to settle differences peacefully. Authoritarian governments see criticism of their actions and doctrines as a challenge to combat. Opposition is equalled with "confrontation", which is interpreted as violent conflict. Regimented minds cannot grasp the concept of confrontation as an open exchange of major differences with a view to settlement through genuine dialogue. The insecurity of power based on coercion translates into a need to crush all dissent. Within the framework of liberal democracy, protest and dissent can exist in healthy counterpart with orthodoxy and conservatism, contained by a general recognition of the need to balance respect for individual rights with respect for law and order.

*Suu Kyi is, however, aware of the dangers of distortion of democratic values by the very persons who are victims of persecution. Her words on this are reminiscent of those of Rosa Luxemburg which we reproduced in the Value of Dissent 2. Suu Kyi writes:*

In a revolutionary movement there is always the danger that political exigencies might obscure, or even nullify, essential spiritual aims. A firm insistence on the inviolability and primacy of such aims is not mere idealism but a necessary safeguard against an Animal Farm syndrome where the new order after its first flush of enthusiastic reforms takes on the murky colours of the very system it has replaced. The

people of Burma want not just a change of government but a change in political values. The unhappy legacies of authoritarianism can be removed only if the concept of absolute power as the basis of government is replaced by the concept of confidence as the mainspring of political authority: the confidence of the people in their right and ability to decide the destiny of their nation, the mutual confidence in the principles of justice, liberty and human rights.... To instil such confidence, not by an appeal to the passions but through intellectual conviction, into a society which has long been wracked by distrust and uncertainty is the essence of the Burmese revolution for democracy. It is a revolution which moves for changes endorsed by universal norms of ethics.

*She concludes this powerful essay:*

The main impetus for struggle is not an appetite for power, revenge and destruction but a genuine respect for freedom, peace and justice. The quest for democracy in Burma is the struggle of a people to live whole, meaningful lives as free and equal members of the world community. It is part of the unceasing human endeavour to prove that the spirit of man can transcend the flaws of his own nature.



Raymond Williams (1921 - 1988)

ART: FREEDOM AS DUTY

*In this essay, Raymond Williams — an outstanding intellectual of the British Left for several decades — examines the notion of artistic freedom, which is perhaps the most visible aspect of freedom of expression. He argues that this notion is not only a matter of individual artists' liberty, but is also a social and political issue. Williams is adding a new twist to the ancient argument — advanced by Socrates some two and a half thousand years ago, and often repeated since — that free discussion is good, is culturally healthy for society. "In modern societies especially", Williams says, "there is a need for many voices, because society needs all the articulated experience.. it can get".*

The philosophical defence of the freedom of the artist can be made in terms of his rights as an individual, or of his rights as an artist, *Williams writes*. I don't want to dispute either of these defences, although they are not the way in which I would primarily put things myself. I think that the need for freedom in the arts is, above all, a social need. I think that the very process of writing is so crucial to the full development of our social life that we do, in an important sense, need every voice. The extreme complexity of any historical and social process being lived out in a particular place at a particular time, the extreme complexity of the interaction of individual lives with all those general conditions, means that you can never at any time say that you have enough voices or that you have representative voices, or that anybody can say in advance what are the important things either to be said or to be written about. This need for many voices is a condition of the cultural health of any complex society, and so the creation of conditions for the freedom of the artist is in that sense the duty of society, not for the sake of any individual artist and not in terms of some abstract argument about rights, but simply because society needs all the articulated experience and all the specific creation it can get.

## Fang Lizhi

### ON POLITICAL REFORM, SCIENCE, DEMOCRACY

*Fang Lizhi is a world famous astrophysicist. From his student days at Beijing University he was articulate in questioning authority and seeking educational reform and greater freedom of expression. At various times in his tumultuous career he was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party, imprisoned, exiled and sent to work in a mine and on a railroad, rehabilitated, and expelled again. At no stage however did he let these events deter him from speaking out on what he thought was right and necessary for the future of Chinese society.*

*Many years after the event Fang described one of his youthful experiments in questioning authority as follows:*

The commotion happened in a Youth League Congress. Some other third-year students and I found the meeting very oppressive, just a bunch of formulaic talk. We were all "Three Goods"<sup>1</sup> students doing well in everything, but somehow we weren't really satisfied. So we decided to liven things up a bit.

We discussed it and decided that on the second day, when the physics department general branch secretary took the podium — of course the branch secretary was in on the plan, he was one of our classmates — he would let me go up there and grab the mike to make a statement, since I had the loudest voice. And so when the branch secretary was speaking, I sprang up, grabbed the mike and started speaking. We really did have this one well planned.

I said, "This meeting is boring and depressing. We should be discussing how young people are being educated. I think that young people should be raised to think for themselves. The 'Three Goods' are not enough, even though we're all 'Three Goods' students. The expression 'Three Goods' itself is depressing". After I spoke, the meeting was

really in an uproar, and as a consequence no one else was even able to speak. The auditorium was in pandemonium.

The next day, the first Party secretary, Comrade Jiang Longji, spoke all day. He said that independent thinking was all well and good, but what we needed right then was to calm down and get back to studying. Afterward we went through some more ideological training. Now, that was in 1955.... Those of us who created this little ruckus were all labeled rightists during the Anti-Rightist Campaign<sup>2</sup>.

*Such was his achievement and standing in the field of science that despite his outspoken nature, Fang gained recognition and position as one of China's leading experts in astrophysics and cosmology, and in 1984 was appointed Vice President of the University of Science and Technology in Beijing. He travelled abroad to scientific conferences and visited various universities as visiting professor or researcher.*

*Fang played an important role in formulating a plan for radical reform of his university, which has been described "a bold vision of academic freedom, such as the People's Republic of China had never known". In an interview published abroad, he lamented that China's intellectuals "lack their own independent mentality and a standard of value, always yield to power, and link their futures to an official career". He called on intellectuals to remake themselves and, instead of being strictly obedient to those above them, to "straighten out their bent backs". He also appealed to the Chinese to "place their hopes in their younger intellectuals who are growing up in the 1980s".*

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<sup>1</sup> Good health, good academic performance, and good moral character

<sup>2</sup> **Anti-Rightist Campaign:** A 1957 political campaign directed against intellectuals who had criticized the Communist Party. During this campaign, one-half million or more people were labeled "rightists", resulting in jail terms or lengthy periods of manual labour in the countryside. The "Rightist" label made its bearers unemployable, effectively ending their careers. This account was given by Fang at a question and answer session at Shanghai's Tongji University in 1986 referred to below.

*The following are extracts from a speech given by Fang Lizhi to the Conference on Reform of the Political Structure held in Hefei, Anhui Province, in September 1986.*

Political reform demands fundamental changes in our thinking. Minor adjustments here and there will not solve our problems. I am not opposed to being prudent in our actions, so as to avoid provoking social turmoil. But we have to start changing our ideas and ideologies. It is only in recent times that Western societies could be called genuinely developed, but the conceptual seeds for these changes were planted much earlier. The Renaissance was one starting place. The Renaissance shattered the existing framework of ideas, especially those underlying feudal and theocratic rule. Starting with the Renaissance came the emergence of many great historical figures in Europe: scientists such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton; philosophers such as Bacon; and political theorists such as Rousseau. Under the influence of these giants, Europe experienced an unprecedented burst of new thinking about society. Liberty and democracy won the day and became great forces for progress....

To carry out political reform we need openness, not restrictions. We have to permit free discussion of different approaches to solving our problems. This requires freedom of expression. Without freedom of expression, academic freedom can't be protected. Only with freedom of expression can we debate about what is right and reasonable, and thus inform our decisions. The success of China's reforms depends on democratization, and democratization depends above all on guaranteeing freedom of expression. This doesn't entail making new laws, because freedom of expression is already stipulated in our Constitution; what it entails is strict compliance with the existing laws. But be that as it may, only when we have democracy and freedom of speech will it do any good for us to go on and talk about anything else.

Right now many good policies are yielding bad results, and the basic reason is a lack of democracy. The separation of Party and state functions, the removal of enterprises from



state control and the system of individual responsibility for profit and loss by factory managers have been poorly implemented. The appointment of younger, better-educated people to leadership posts has also been mishandled. Democratization is the key to such reforms. We used to say that bourgeois democracy is false democracy. But false democracy brought down the American president in the Watergate scandal. If what we have in China is real democracy, then Chinese citizens should also have the ability to expose unethical practices on the part of their leaders and remove those who have violated their trust. If we had really reached this point, China would have a self-regulating political system. But we have not. The people have no way of controlling corruption, other than to hope that the top leadership will take notice and put a stop to it. Democracy is the core of reform, and everything else is secondary. Only through democracy will we begin to move in a healthy direction...

We must start realizing that a government does not bestow favours on its citizens, but rather that the citizens maintain the government and consent to allowing certain people to lead on their behalf. We constantly hear talk about "extending democracy", but this is very mistaken, because it suggests that democracy is something that can be "extended" from the top down. In a democracy, the power rests with each individual. I fulfil my obligations as a citizen of this society, and in turn I am due my rights. These rights are the basis of my political power. I have the right to mind my country's business, and to demand the dismissal of unfit leaders. This is really just common sense, but the idea has not yet caught on in China. Many Chinese still believe that blessings are bestowed upon them by the government, as opposed to being the consequence of their own hard work. A new attitude in this regard is essential.

*Fang's best known speech is probably that on democracy, reform and modernization delivered in Shanghai in 1986 to about 3000 students and faculty members, which was followed by a long and lively question and answer session. In answer*

*to one question, he defended his refusal to apologise to the city of Beijing for having publicly criticised the decision to include its Vice-Mayor in a delegation to an international scientific conference on synchrotron radiation.*

All I said was that Zhang Baifa doesn't know anything about synchrotron radiation.

The next day there was a phone call to Hefei, demanding that I apologize to Beijing. I didn't take the call; it was received by our USTC president, Comrade Guan Weiyan. Comrade Guan stood right up to them and said "Comrade Fang Lizhi has no need to apologize". Last month Guan Weiyan and I went to the Chinese Academy of Sciences and told them why what we did was right, and why allowing Zhang Baifa to go on the trip was wrong.

*Another question related to the "Four Cardinal Principles" set down by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, which called for upholding the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Communist Party and the leading role of Marxism — Leninism — Mao Zedong thought. The exchange went as follows:*

Question: Is the current emphasis on the "Four Cardinal Principles" a necessity for developing our productive forces, or a fallacy based on the personal feelings of the leadership?

Fang: I think that the Four Cardinal Principles are a political article of faith. Not long ago, in September, a newspaper ran a story on my opinions about the kind of atmosphere that should prevail in a university. I said that a university should have a spirit of science, democracy, creativity, and independence. After the reporter had finished transcribing what I had said, he sent me a note. It said, "This spirit is very good, but you had better say a little more, because people might interpret what you're saying as reflecting on the Four Cardinal Principles. There are four of them, and you mention four things — it could be a little dangerous".

He said, "Maybe you could just add a couple of sentences that let people know what you really mean". So afterward, I sent him back a letter saying that I would add a paragraph.

What I advocated was that a university must possess a spirit of science, of democracy, of creativity, and of independence — four things. Now there are some people who are oversensitive about the "Four Upholds". They're always looking to see if a statement contradicts the Four Upholds. As soon as they see anything that comes in fours, they want to know if it is meant to contradict the Four Upholds. So what I added was this: "Is it possible that science, democracy, creativity, and independence are in conflict with the Four Upholds? If so, it's because the Four Upholds advocate the opposite of science, which is superstition; the opposite of democracy, which is dictatorship; the opposite of creativity, which is conservatism; and the opposite of independence, which is dependency". This was the paragraph that I added. The reporter said that it was even worse than the previous version.

I think we have to go all out in fostering this spirit. If somebody confronts you on it, ask them right back, "Do you mean to say that the Four Upholds are in conflict with science and democracy? If they are in conflict with science, democracy, and so on, then it must be because the Four Upholds advocate superstition, dictatorship, conservatism, and dependency". You tell them that, and see how they respond.

*The reforms at the University of Science and Technology at first appeared to receive official approval but this was short-lived. Fang and the President of the University were removed from their posts, and they became the subject of sustained and vehement attacks in the official Chinese press.*

*Fang was nevertheless permitted to go to Italy briefly to participate in a scientific meeting. He recounts how on his arrival his Italian colleagues tried to persuade him to stay on permanently, assuring him of research facilities and a professorship. He described his response as follows:*

Thanking them warmly, I declined. This was not because I had any expectation of returning home to a headline like "Prof. X. Resolutely Turns Down Offer of Foreign Employment and Returns to the Motherland". No one like myself, who retains only one political right — the right to confess my mistakes — will ever be thus featured.....

No, as far as my decision to return is concerned, the words of Johann Schweigger are more relevant:

If a crippled opponent utters not a sound yet refuses to subordinate himself and be among the ranks of sycophants and lackeys of a tyrant, then his continued existence will be a source of troubles.

*During the next three years, however, there followed a series of events which culminated in Fang's reluctantly leaving China in 1990, and continuing abroad his career as an astrophysicist. But he said:*

"If circumstances allow I will go immediately back to China to make whatever contribution I can, because I can only really function there"



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The extracts quoted above are taken from *Bringing Down the Great Wall, Writings on Science, Culture and Democracy in China*, by Fang Lizhi. The editorial notes are drawn from Orville Schell's introduction to that publication.

## THE APPEAL OF 42 SCIENTISTS

*In January 1989 Fang Lizhi, whom we featured in the previous chapter, wrote to the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping appealing for the release of political prisoners. This stimulated 42 prominent Chinese academicians, including 27 natural scientists, to address an open letter to the entire leadership of the country and the Communist Party. They referred to the decision of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress which took as its guiding principle "emancipation of the mind" and called for "openness and reform". Yet, they contended, despite this stand, science, education and the arts in China were in crisis. If there were to be genuine transformation of society, they argued, a new atmosphere which welcomed debate and dissent, would be needed. This they called "political democratization". Below are some extracts from this appeal.*

1. Maintaining the basic premise of openness and reform, vigorously carry out simultaneous reform of political institutions – that is, political democratization – and of the economy. World history and the present reality of China both tell us that democratization (including the rule of law) is the indispensable guarantee of economic reform and the whole modernisation endeavour. Only in realizing democratization will the people's initiative and active participation be brought into play. Only through democratization can the whole people gladly shoulder their burdens when inevitable difficulties arise in the reform process, and pooling our efforts and our wisdom, find that there is no obstacle that cannot be overcome. Furthermore, under the conditions of a commodity economy, only the realization of democracy with expanded accountability to the people and effective public supervision will allow clean government to exist. Without supervisory power in the hands of the people, there will be no way to put an end to corruption. This is an inescapable law of history that has long been recognised by all.

2. The first condition for political democratization is to thoroughly guarantee all the basic rights of citizens stipulated in the Constitution, especially the rights of citizens to freedom of speech and freedom of the press. As long as the people can speak out freely, and differing opinions can be openly expressed, and leaders can be criticised without fear of attack or revenge, then the atmosphere in our country will be lively, uninhibited, and harmonious, and the citizens will fully exercise their democratic consciousness. This is the only reliable guarantee of unity and stability. From this starting point the reforms can proceed smoothly.

3. In order to stop further occurrences of the historical tragedy of making political criminals out of those who express, in speaking or writing, dissenting political views, please instruct the various departments concerned to release all young people who have been sentenced to prison or labour reform for ideological reasons. In putting an end to the prosecution of political crimes, our country will be entering a new political era.

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Wendell Phillips (1811 - 1884)

EXCERPTS FROM SPEECHES

*Well-known as an activist in the American anti-slavery movement, as a supporter of women's suffrage, and as a campaigner for labour reform, Wendell Phillips was a model of nineteenth-century liberal reforming zeal: a tireless worker for humane causes, irreproachable in his own conduct, and an excellent public speaker, as these three excerpts from speeches on the theme of free speech amply demonstrate:*

If there is anything that cannot bear free thought, let it crack. Nothing but Freedom, Justice and Truth is of any permanent advantage to the mass of mankind. To these society, left to itself, is always tending. "The right to think, to know, to utter", as John Milton [the great English poet and radical, 1608-74] said, "is the dearest of all liberties". Without this right there can be no liberty to any people; with it, there can be no slavery.

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No matter whose the lips that would speak, they must be free and ungagged. The community which dares not protect its humblest and most hated member in the free utterance of his opinion, no matter how false or hateful, is only a gang of slaves.

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When you have convinced thinking men that it is right, and humane men that it is just, you will gain your cause. Men always lose half of what is gained by violence. What is gained by argument, is gained forever.



"The Constitution demands the protection of the right to think as you will, and to speak as you think (Whitney v California, (1927) 274 U.S. 357) subject to limitations which are inherent, as well as restrictions imposed by law under Article 15. Subject to that, the expression of views, which may be unpopular, obnoxious, distasteful or wrong, is nevertheless within the ambit of freedom of speech and expression, provided of course there is no advocacy of, or incitement to, violence or other illegal conduct.... stifling the peaceful expression of legitimate dissent today can only result, inexorably, in the catastrophic explosion of violence some other day".

Mark Fernando J. in *Amaratunga v Sirimal*  
(the *jana ghosha* case)

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