

THE VALUE OF DISSENT



2

GALILEO
GALILEI

ROSA
LUXEMBURG

JAWAHARLAL
NEHRU

ROBERT
MUTCH

MARK
TWAIN

JOHN
STUART
MILL

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

CONTENTS

THE VALUE OF DISSENT

2

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OF SRI LANKA

Editorial Board

Charles Abeysekera
Kumari Jayawardena
Suriya Wickremasinghe

Chief Researcher and Compiler

Mark Thompson

Project Coordinator

Ranjith Perera

© Copyright Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka - 1997

Published by

Bernadeen Silva for and on behalf of
Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka
31, Charles Place, Colombo 3

First Edition- July 1993

Second Edition - October 1997

Printed by

Karunaratne & Sons Ltd.
647, Kularatne Mawatha
Colombo 10
Sri Lanka

CONTENTS

<i>Galileo Galilei</i>	
<hr/>	
THE TWO CHIEF WORLD SYSTEMS	1
<i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	
<hr/>	
THE PROBLEM OF DICTATORSHIP	4
<i>Jawaharlal Nehru</i>	
<hr/>	
ON CIVIL LIBERTY	9
<i>Robert E. Mutch</i>	
<hr/>	
POLITICAL TOLERANCE	11
<i>Mark Twain</i>	
<hr/>	
THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN	16
<i>John Stuart Mill</i>	
<hr/>	
OF INDIVIDUALITY	20
Acknowledgments	22

Galileo Galilei (1564 - 1642)

THE TWO CHIEF WORLD SYSTEMS

Perhaps the most famous case in human history of the wrongful suppression of dissent is that of the 17th century scientist Galileo Galilei, who argued that the sun, and not the earth, is the centre of the universe. His treatise *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, published in Florence, Italy, in 1632, was banned by the Inquisition.

The 69 year old Galileo, despite his pleas of age and poor health was forced to travel to Rome to face a trial. There he was compelled to recite a recantation that he 'abjured, cursed and detested' his past errors. However,

according to legend, as he left the judges he muttered under his breath the words 'Eppur Si Muove' - It (the earth) does move all the same. Galileo was kept under house arrest for the remainder of his life.

The following excerpt is from the banned treatise in which characters representing different schools of astronomical thought discuss their views.



GALILEO

SIMPLICIO

How do you deduce that it is not the earth, but the sun, which is at the centre of the universe?

SALVATO

That is deduced from most obvious and therefore most powerfully convincing observations. The most palpable of these, which excludes the earth from the centre and places the sun there, is that we find all the planets closer to the earth at one time and further from it at another. The differences are so great that Venus, for example, is six times as distant from us at its furthest or at its closest, and Mars soars nearly eight times as high in one state as in the other. You may then see whether Aristotle was not some trifle deceived in believing that they were always equally distant from us.

SIMPLICIO

But what are the signs that they move around the sun?

SALVATO

This is reasoned out from finding the three other planets - Mars, Jupiter and Saturn - always quite close to the earth when they are in opposition to the sun and very distant when they are in conjunction with it. This approach and recession is of such moment that Mars when close looks sixty times as large as when it is most distant. Next it is certain that Venus and Mercury must revolve around the sun, because of their never moving far away from it, and because of their being seen now beyond it and now by the side of it, as Venus's changes of shape conclusively prove.

POSTSCRIPT

On 31st October 1992 the Catholic church officially admitted that it had been wrong. The following is from one of the many press reports of this event.

VATICAN CITY. Oct. 31 (AFP) - The Roman Catholic Church was wrong to drag astronomer Galileo before the inquisition for claiming the earth span on its own axis around the sun, Pope John Paul II said on Saturday.

Speaking at the end of a 12-year revision of the infamous 17th century trial of the physicist, in which Galileo was forced to recant his then revolutionary theory, the Pontiff declared the trial was a "tragic mutual misunderstanding".

Pisa-born Galileo (1564-1642) was hauled before the inquisition in Rome for supporting the theories of the Polish monk Copernicus (1473-1543), who said the earth span on its own axis and orbited the sun.

On Saturday Pope John Paul II said the Catholic Church should "learn the lesson of the Galileo affair" which he said was pertinent now and for the future.

The Pope regretted the "error" of theologians of the time who believed the structure of the galaxy could only be divined literally from holy scriptures.

The Pope said charging Galileo, "a sincere believer" and a "scientific genius", was "hasty and unfortunate".

"In their anxiety to defend the faith they thought they had to reject historical conclusions seriously worked out", said the Pope.

John Paul II said he had called for a revision of the trial, a process which has taken 12 years, because it touched on the relationship between science and faith.

"Thus we cannot exclude that one day a similar case could arise" said the Pope, adding that both sides would have to be aware of the limit of "their own competences."

The Pope made his comments during an extraordinary meeting of the pontifical Academy of Sciences, attended by ambassadors from around the world, in the Royal room in the Apostolic Palace.

Rosa Luxemburg (1870 -1919)

THE PROBLEM OF DICTATORSHIP

The most brilliant woman in the Marxist movement and one of its leading revolutionary intellectuals was Rosa Luxemburg. Born to a Jewish family in Poland, she studied in Switzerland and moved to Germany where she was active in the German Communist Party (SDP) and became one of its outstanding leaders. Her contributions to Marxist theory were on key issues such as those in her writings *The Accumulation of Capital*, *The National Question and Autonomy*, *Against Revisionism and Trade Union Struggle* and *Mass Strike*. She had serious political disagreements with other Marxist theoreticians on the *National Question*, and caused a lot of controversy by her critique of the Bolshevik revolution.



ROSA LUXEMBURG

Rosa Luxemburg was also critical of the SDP's support of Germany in the First World War, and formed part of a group of Marxists who were jailed for their opposition to German militarism. The left opposition in Germany led by Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht formed the Spartacist group which was involved in a failed attempt at revolution in 1919 ending in their murder by state forces. At her death, even those who had criticised her on the Left, praised her contribution to revolutionary theory and practice, Lenin remarking that "in spite of her mistakes she was - and remains for us - an eagle."

The *Problem of Dictatorship* is from Rosa Luxemburg's well known pamphlet *The Russian Revolution* written while in

prison in 1918, even as the outcome of the October Revolution was still very uncertain. Among the words for which she is particularly remembered is her statement that freedom only for supporters of the government is no freedom at all, and that freedom is always for the one who thinks differently.

Lenin says: the bourgeois state is an instrument of oppression of the working class; the socialist state, of the bourgeoisie. To a certain extent, he says, it is only the capitalist state stood on its head. This simplified view misses the most essential thing: bourgeois class rule has no need of the political training and education of the entire mass of people, at least not beyond certain narrow limits. But for the proletarian dictatorship that is the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist.

“Thanks to the open and direct struggle for governmental power,” writes Trotsky, “the laboring masses accumulate in the shortest time a considerable amount of political experience and advance quickly from one stage to another of their development.”

Here Trotsky refutes himself and his own friends. Just because this is so, they have blocked up the fountain of political experience and the source of this rising development by their suppression of public life! Or else we would have to assume that experience and development were necessary up to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, and then, having reached their highest peak, became superfluous thereafter. (*Lenin's speech: Russia is won for socialism!!!*)

In reality, the opposite is true! It is the very giant tasks which the Bolsheviks have undertaken with courage and determination that demand the most intensive political training of the masses and the accumulation of experience.

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of “justice” but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when “freedom” becomes a special privilege.

The Bolsheviks themselves will not want, with hand on heart, to deny that, step by step, they have to feel out the

ground, try out, experiment, test now one way now another, and that a good many of their measures do not represent priceless pearls of wisdom. Thus it must and will be with all of us when we get to the same point – even if the same difficult circumstances may not prevail everywhere.

The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of the dictatorship is this: that the socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice. This is, unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately – not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future. What we possess in our program is nothing but a few main signposts which indicate the general direction in which to look for the necessary measures, and the indications are mainly negative in character at that. Thus we know more or less what we must eliminate at the outset in order to free the road for a socialist economy. But when it comes to the nature of the thousand concrete, practical measures, large and small, necessary to introduce socialist principles into economy, law and all social relationships, there is no key in any socialist party program or textbook. That is not a shortcoming but rather the very thing that makes scientific socialism superior to the utopian varieties. The socialist system of society should only be, and can only be, an historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realization, as a result of the developments of living history, which – just like organic nature of which, in the last analysis, it forms a part – has the fine habit of always producing along with any real social need the means to its satisfaction, along with the task simultaneously the solution. However, if such is the case, then it is clear that socialism by its very nature cannot be decreed or introduced by *ukase*. It has as its prerequisite a number of measures of force – against property, etc. The negative, the tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot. New territory. A thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative

force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts. The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress. (Proof: the year 1905 and the months from February to October 1917.) There it was political in character; the same thing applies to economic and social life also. The whole mass of the people must take part in it. Otherwise, socialism will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen intellectuals.

Public control is indispensably necessary. Otherwise the exchange of experiences remains only with the closed circle of the officials of the new regime. Corruption becomes inevitable. (*Lenin's words, Bulletin No. 29*). Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois class rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism, which conquers all suffering, etc., etc. No one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly, repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. But he is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconic penalties, rule by terror – all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes.

When all this is eliminated, what really remains? In place of the representative bodies created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the soviets as the only true representation of the laboring masses. But with the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a

dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat, however, but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins (the postponement of the Soviet Congress from three-month period to six-month period!). Yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages, etc. (*Lenin's speech on discipline and corruption.*)

Recognising the value of dissent means valuing the tolerance of dissent. In themselves individual expressions of dissent may often be of little worth; they will include the outpourings of the crank and the crackpot – or what seem to be such by the standards of the day. But the degree to which dissent is tolerated reflects the health of society and ensures that it has within it the potential for progress.

*– from the Introduction to
The Value of Dissent 1*

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889 -1964)

ON CIVIL LIBERTY

Born in 1889, Nehru studied in Harrow and Cambridge from 1905-1910 and returned to India in 1912. From then up to his death in 1964, Nehru was in the political struggle for Indian independence and was in and out of jail for many years. He participated along with Mahatma Gandhi in the most dramatic episodes of the nationalist movement namely the Non-Cooperation actions of the early 1920's, the Civil Disobedience Movement and Salt March of 1930, and Satyagraha campaigns and Quit India agitation of the 1940's. He was the President



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

of the Indian National Congress on several occasions, also belonging to the socialist tendency within the Congress. He was the first Prime Minister of independent India from 1947 to his death.

Nehru was also for many decades a prominent world leader, participating in anti-imperialist agitation, opposing fascism in Spain, Italy and Germany. After independence he was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned movement and championed Afro Asian solidarity, peaceful co-existence, disarmament and world peace.

All his life Nehru was inspired by social democratic principles, by a commitment to secularism, a mixed economy, humane values and internationalism. He deplored racism, caste, communalism, obscurantism, superstition and religious bigotry.

His speeches and writings reflect his broad humanitarian vision, his championship of oppressed groups and nations, and his deep commitment to freedom and democracy.

Civil liberty is not merely for us an airy doctrine or a pious wish, but something which we consider essential for the orderly development and progress of a nation. It is the civilised approach to a problem about which people differ, the non-violent way of dealing with it. To crush a contrary opinion forcibly and to allow it no expression, because we dislike it, is essentially of the same genus as cracking the skull of an opponent because we disapprove of him. It does not even possess the virtue of success.

The man with the cracked skull might collapse and die, but the suppressed opinion or idea has no such sudden end and it survives and prospers the more it is sought to be crushed with force. History is full of such examples.

Long experience has taught us that it is dangerous in the interest of truth to suppress opinions and ideas; it has further taught us that it is foolish to imagine that we can do so.

It is far easier to meet an evil in the open and to repel it in fair combat in people's minds than to drive it underground and have no hold on it or proper approach to it. Evil flourishes far more in the shadows than in the light of the day.



Robert E. Mutch (1940 -)

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

Robert E. Mutch is a political scientist living in Washington and the author of Campaigns, Congress and Courts: The Making of Federal Campaign Finance Law, and several articles on politics and history.

Several years ago a small country shut down the opposition newspaper and prohibited anti-government speeches and writing. In response to outcries from international human rights organizations protesting denial of the right to free speech, the country's leaders assured the world that they had not eliminated that right; they simply found it necessary to temporarily suspend its exercise.

Freedom of speech and press have come to be regarded as one of the hallmarks of a truly advanced nation. A very few government leaders are brazenly indifferent to the pariah status they earn by denying these rights to their citizens, but most are eager to avoid international condemnation by maintaining, in defiance of the facts if need be, that freedom of speech prevails in their country.

Clearly, it is easier to adhere to that freedom in principle than in practice. An unbridled press is not always a problem; in some circumstances it can even be a showpiece, something to show off to foreign visitors. But when journalists and political opponents begin to criticize government policies and the officials who devise and implement them, it becomes more difficult to see them as fellow citizens, and easier to regard them as enemies who must be silenced for the good of the country. The names applied to these critics throughout history reveal how they were seen by those in power: heretics, blasphemers, renegades, subversives, counter-revolutionaries, traitors, or simply the dregs of society.

These accusatory labels also suggest that the freedom of speech will not long endure where it is regarded as something given by those who govern to those who are governed. Sooner or later some of the latter will begin using their new freedom in

ways that offend the former, who will take back their gift. Only where governors and governed are one, where people govern themselves, will free speech strike deep roots. The reason for this is clear.

Those who govern must be able to speak freely among themselves. Even an absolute monarch must have advisers, and they will have greater liberty to speak their mind than will other subjects. Even a government that censors the press must trust someone to read all books and articles in order to select those to be banned. Final authority rests with the sovereign, but that authority cannot be exercised without more information, experience, and judgement than can be provided by one or a few persons. The more numerous are the governors, the broader must be the freedom of speech. A people who govern themselves, either directly or through elected representatives, are themselves sovereign and must exercise their authority through majority vote. Only if they may freely express their minds will a majority be able to reach a decision.

The English poet John Milton wrote the classic defence of freedom of speech in 1644. His central argument was that only by allowing all sides to speak, expressing even those ideas many find offensive, can we arrive at the truth. He stated his opposition to censorship in a passage that has been much quoted since:

"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 prohibiting to mis-doubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and fair encounter?"

Two hundred years later the English philosopher John Stuart Mill expanded upon Milton's thoughts in his famous essay, *On Liberty*. He pointed out that suppressing an opinion is the same as "robbing the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation." He further insisted that suppression harms people whether the banned opinion is true or false. "If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth produced by its collision with error."

Milton and Mill argued that we can believe in the truth of an opinion only if it is open to debate. The censor's attitude is

that, because he believes certain opinions to be true, no criticism of them will be permitted. The two English writers reply that it is only through criticism that the truth can be ascertained, that we can accept as true only those opinions that have withstood attack.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, one of the best known justices of the United States Supreme Court, expressed a very similar view in 1919.

“Persecution for the expression of opinion seems to me perfectly logical. If you have no doubt of your premises or your power and want a certain result with all your heart you naturally express your wishes in law and sweep away all opposition... But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe that the ultimate good desired is better reached by 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.”

Justice Holmes’ reference to “free trade in ideas” and “the competition of the market” gave rise to the phrase “the market place of ideas”, a 20th century American label for an idea that is at least 350 years old. In a historical twist, the arguments of the two English writers today furnish the standard interpretation of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

The United States has a written constitution with several formal amendments. Freedom of speech is guaranteed to American citizens by the very first of these amendments, adopted in 1791: “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.” But America’s commitment to freedom of expression did not begin in 1791. Rather, adoption of the constitutional amendment codified into law a tradition of popular government that was already more than a century old.

Perhaps the purest form of popular self-government can be found in the American town meeting, which dates back to 17th Century New England. When a town’s inhabitants come together in the meeting, they do so not to debate abstract issues of democracy, but to decide such mundane questions as whether to buy a new dump truck or a fire engine, or to renovate the existing school house or build a new one. Citizens meet as governors. They must talk in order to govern, and since disagreement is inevitable – Milton noted that we cannot expect “that no grievances should ever arise in the commonwealth” – a

clash of views is also inevitable. Popular sovereignty requires the airing of all opinions on these matters.

Yet even democratic governments have punished or harassed people for no other reason than the views they expressed. Countries with suffrages broader than Milton dreamed or Mill desired have themselves been infected with the absolutist conviction that some ideas must be suppressed because they are offensive and dangerous.

John Stuart Mill anticipated such thinking in 1859 when he noted that some of a society's reigning opinions claim protection from attack not so much because they are true in an objective or "scientific" sense, but because of their social and political importance. Such reigning opinions may concern the political system – representative government and free speech themselves – economic institutions or religious practices.

Although such suppression contradicts the idea of free speech, it is nevertheless often defended in terms of commitment to that ideal. All societies rest on a consensus, the argument goes, a consensus which accommodates some diversity of opinion on the best ways to attain shared national goals. Opinions from outside that consensus do not contribute to a constructive debate about the best means to a common end, but promote different ends. That is, they challenge the consensus on which the society rests, and thus challenge the society itself. In the extreme case, it is suggested, guarantees of freedom of speech should not protect those who would abolish those very same freedoms. Even the most open society must defend itself against its enemies, the argument concludes, and those who challenge the very foundations of society must be regarded, and treated, as enemies.

Neither Milton nor Mill addressed a situation in which speech is suppressed by a majority, by a self-governing people acting through democratic institutions. But both insisted that requiring people to assent to a particular belief, even to the idea of democracy itself, will not produce the expected benefits; it will, they warned, weaken rather than strengthen the protected idea. "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue", wrote Milton, "that never sallies out and sees her adversary... that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary." Mill agreed, pointing out that those who hold beliefs only because they are required to do so and not because they have come to

understand, through argument, the grounds of those beliefs, really have no opinions at all, only prejudices: "Truth, thus held", Mill concluded, "is but one superstition the more, accidentally clinging to the words which enunciate a truth."

Such thinking is unworthy of a free people. Whenever commitment to an idea is not forged by defending it against strong argument, the grounds for belief in that idea cannot be clearly understood, and it thus becomes vulnerable to attack by poor arguments. Belief inculcated through rote learning is not only unworthy, it also constitutes a weakness in the body politic. Where criticism is unknown some will embrace it as thoughtlessly as they once championed its target, while others will fear and reject it. Vigorous debate flourishes only where it is familiar, and this familiarity is neither quickly achieved nor always proof against passion and prejudice.

An example of this last point is provided by the actions of two famous adversaries among the Founders of the United States, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Hamilton, one of the drafters of the Constitution, denied that it needed a bill of rights, claiming that individual rights were already guaranteed by that document. Jefferson disagreed and successfully promoted the addition of formal guarantees. Both men vigorously defended press and speech freedoms, differing only on the wisdom and efficacy of explicit provisions for them. The sad fact is that while in office both men also supported prosecution of opposition newspapers.

On the positive side is the fact that these prosecutions failed to suppress Hamilton's and Jefferson's political opponents. The main reason for the failure is that a people born into freedom will not readily give it up. Individuals can be frightened into silence, but whole peoples cannot be so cowed unless they are already accustomed to it. This accords with what Hamilton wrote in 1788, when arguing against a bill of rights: 'What signifies a declaration that the liberty of the press shall be inviolably preserved?... its security, whatever fine declarations may be inserted in any constitution respecting it, must altogether depend on public opinion and on the general spirit of the people and of the government.'

Mark Twain (1835 - 1910)

THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN (1884)

Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is his masterpiece, and one of the great works of American fiction. Huck Finn, the young hero of the book, describes his adventures after his father; a drunken ne'er-do-well, takes him away from the widow Douglas. Huck escapes from his father and joins up with Jim, a slave who has run away from his owner, one Miss Watson. Together they sail away down the huge Mississippi river on a raft.

Huck and Jim soon fall in with a pair of rogues, itinerant con-men down on their luck.

Eventually these two kidnap Jim when Huck is ashore, away from the raft; they want to sell him for a reward (there being a cash reward for capturing escaped slaves). When Huck discovers what has happened, he tries to convince himself that he doesn't need to try and rescue his friend.

Once I said to myself it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was, as long as he'd got to be a slave, and so I'd better write a letter to Tom Sawyer



HUCK AND JIM

and tell him to tell Miss Watson where he was. But I soon give up that notion for two things: she'd be mad and disgusted at his rascality and ungratefulness for leaving her, and so she'd sell him straight down the river again; and if she didn't, everybody naturally despises an ungrateful nigger, and they'd make Jim feel it all the time, and so he'd feel ornery and disgraced. And then think of *me*! It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling. And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't a-going to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur and no further, I just dropped in my tracks I was so scared. Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame; but something inside of me kept saying, "There was the Sunday school, you could 'a' gone to it; and if you'd 'a' done it they'd 'a' learnt you there that people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire."

It made me shiver. And I about made up my mind to pray, and see if I couldn't try to quit being the kind of a boy I was and be better. So I kneeled down. But the words wouldn't come. Why wouldn't they? It warn't no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from me, neither. I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. It was because my heart warn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting *on* to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth *say* I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to the nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie, and He knowed it. You

can't pray a lie – I found that out.

So I was full of trouble, full as I could be; and didn't know what to do. At last I had an idea; and I says, I'll go and write the letter – and *then* see if I can pray. Why, it was astonishing, the way I felt as light as a feather right straight off, and my troubles all gone. So I got a piece of paper and a pencil, all glad and excited, and set down and wrote:

"Miss Watson, your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville, and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send".

Huck is relieved at having reached a decision, but his satisfaction does not last when he begins to remember his friendship with Jim. His resolution drains away, and he is led to a radical change of mind:

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and sat there thinking – thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time: in the day and in the night time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n' stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now; and then I happened to look around and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and

then says to myself:

" All right, then, I'll go to hell" – and tore it up.

" All right, then, I'll go to hell" –and just for the sake of a runaway slave! To some readers in America in 1884, Huck's behaviour was outrageous. Nowadays, though it is still powerful, Christianity is no longer such a strong social orthodoxy, and few people, probably, now believe in Hell. But this will always be a magnificent moment: a moment when Twain's skill lets us see a character in the very act of thinking for himself, of realising the human consequences of conventional prejudice, of recognising the claims of conscience, and reaching his own brave, independent decision.

If a man does not keep pace
with his companions
perhaps it is because he hears
a different drummer.

Let him step to the music
he hears –
however measured or far away.

Thoreau

John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873)

OF INDIVIDUALITY

John Stuart Mill was one of the leading radical philosophers of the 19th century associated with the broad movement for democratic rights and social reform in Britain. These movements were against feudal privilege and for the extension of franchise rights, the reform of parliament, women's emancipation and the democratisation of British institutions and society.

*Mill is best known for three major works. They are his essay *On Liberty* (1859) which became the classic 19th century defence of freedom of speech; *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), a seminal work on democratic government; and, in 1869, *The Subjection of Women*, his famous statement on the need for women's suffrage.*

J. S. Mill was also actively involved in many current political issues and was elected to Parliament in 1865, playing a key role in the franchise reform bills of 1866-7. He also supported the North in the USA in the movement to abolish slavery, and sponsored legislation to reform land tenure in Britain. Mill's radicalism was more than the liberals of the time were prepared to accept. He was one of the founders in 1867 of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. He gave money for the electoral expenses of the atheist Charles Bradlaugh who, after election to parliament, refused to swear on the Bible and was disqualified; Mill also attacked the Governor of Jamaica for his brutal repression of a revolt. His daring stand on these issues led to his electoral defeat in 1868. He retired to France and died there in 1873.

I have said that it is important to give the freest scope possible to uncustomary things, in order that it may in time appear which of these are fit to be converted into customs. But independence of action, and disregard of custom, are not solely deserving of encouragement for the chance they afford that better modes of action, and customs more worthy of general adoption, may be struck out; nor is it only persons of decided mental superiority who have a just claim to carry on their lives

in their own way. There is no reason that all human existence should be constructed on some one or some small number of patterns. If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is the best, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode. Human beings are not like sheep; and even sheep are not undistinguishable alike. A man cannot get a coat or a pair of boots to fit him unless they are either made to his measure, or he has a whole warehouseful to choose from: and is it easier to fit him with a life than with a coat, or are human beings more like one another in their whole physical and spiritual conformation than in the shape of their feet? If it were only that people have diversities of taste, that is reason enough for not attempting to shape them all after one model. But different persons also require different conditions for their spiritual development; and can no more exist healthily in the same moral, than all the variety of plants can in the same physical, atmosphere and climate. The same things which are helps to one person towards the cultivation of his higher nature are hindrances to another. The same mode of life is a healthy excitement to one, keeping all his faculties of action and enjoyment in their best order, while to another it is a distracting burthen, which suspends or crushes all internal life. Such are the differences among human beings in their sources of pleasure, their susceptibilities of pain, and the operation on them of different physical and moral agencies, that unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic stature of which their nature is capable.

Acknowledgments

The extract from Galileo's *Dialogue* is reproduced from the Chatto Book of Dissent ed. Michael Rosen and David Widgery, Chatto & Windus, London 1991. The illustration on the front cover is from Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, Florence 1632 (Volume, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations). The portrait of Galileo is an engraving by Ottavio Leoni, 1624 (Print Collection, Miriam and Ida D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations). *The Huckleberry Finn* illustration is reprinted with permission of the American Library Association, from the 1988 Banned Books Week RESOURCE BOOK. The photograph of Rosa Luxemburg is taken from *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* copyright © 1970 by Pathfinder Press, reprinted by permission. *The Problem of Dictatorship* is reproduced from the above publication, and from *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism* by Rosa Luxemburg, Ann Arbor Paperbacks for the Study of Communism and Marxism, The University of Michigan Press, 1961. CRM is grateful to Jeannine Guthrie of Asia Watch in particular for her help in tracing sources and obtaining permissions. The CRM logo on the back cover is by Richard Gabriel.

CRM is once again indebted to INDEX on Censorship for its encouragement and practical support.

HAVE YOU GOT YOUR COPY OF NO 1 IN THIS SERIES?

Featured in *The Value of Dissent 1* are the 19th century physician Dr. John Snow's research which halted the spread of cholera, the humble servant in Shakespeare's *King Lear* who spoke out against evil, and Gautama Buddha's wise counsel on the importance of thinking for oneself. There are extracts from E. M. Forster on democracy (1939), Judge Louis Brandeis on freedom of speech (1927), and Adam Michnik's *Letters from Prison* (1983). Writing for this publication in 1992, Stephen Spender shares with us his concern for the future of democracy in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. There is an Introduction by CRM.

Available in English, Sinhala and Tamil at bookshops and other sales points. Rs. 20.
Mail order 31, Charles Place, Colombo 3.

