

Protecting Democracy: The Freedom of the Press

Speech given by Dr. Nick Demos at the City Hall of Toronto

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Our modern Philosophical background of Freedom of the Press comes from the writings of the triple John's:

John Milton's 1644 edition of Areopagitica

John Locke in 1695

John Stuart Mill in 1869

Some basic Principles and Assumptions for the Freedom of Press are:

- The very survival of democracy inevitably depends on the freedom of the press.
- The most important ingredient of **democracy** is the existence of free and fearless press.

Why Free Press is important ingredient of democracy?

Due mainly to:

Checking Attributes such as:

- A free Press is good for healthy democracy, which serves as a medium between the government and the governed.

- A Free and Healthy Press is the one that criticizes when things go wrong and applauds when things are right.
- A Free and Independent Press, has the ability to call to account those with political power. Without this right, there is no democracy.

Indeed:

- ✓ The voice of the press is the voice of the people.
- ✓ In a democracy, the press must enjoy complete freedom and should not be subjected to any restriction.
- ✓ Censoring the press means the suppression of people's voice.

Also

Free Press is important ingredient of democracy because of

Information attributes:

- It keeps the people informed of the national and international news and happenings.
- It brings to the notice of people the programmes, policies and activities of the government.
- It keeps the Government in the know of the people's problems, difficulties, hopes and aspirations.

Indeed, all people in power and almost all politicians pinpoint the

❖ **Vital role that the free press plays in a democracy**

❖ For example Obama said:

"Journalists give all of us, as citizens, the chance to know the truth about our countries, ourselves, our governments,"

and he stressed

"Freedom of Press makes us better, it makes us stronger, it gives voice to the voiceless, it exposes injustice, and holds leaders like me accountable."

Of course, with Freedom of the Press comes greater responsibility

And

❖ The media must use this power to investigate where there is a need for accurate information and tell the stories people need to know.

Indeed:

- ❖ A strong democracy is an informed democracy, where every citizen has the right to information, the right to think for themselves and the right to speak for themselves.

Today though, the Freedom of Press faces some challenges

Some of these CHALLENGES are:

ABUSE (by AUTOCRATS and/or DICTATORS)

- Freedom of Press has been compromised by ideology fanatics and autocrats around the globe.
- Free press is under attack by governments that want to avoid the truth and Journalists are harassed, sometimes even killed, independent media outlets are shut down, and freedom of expression is silenced.
- Many times an autocrat or a dictator uses the press for reflecting his ideology and policies.
- So is freedom of the press really in the people's best interests in a dictatorship?
- **Possibly NOT and even John Stuart Mill warned us:**

“that truth is the enemy of government control, and that freedom of the press is the only way to ensure that our press is not mere propaganda”.

A second challenge is the credibility issue.

CREDIBILITY associated with Anonymity esp. on Digital Media

- ❖ In today's digital communications world, there are many issues of credible reporting.
- ❖ False stories and fake news are abundant on the Digital Media (such as Facebook, etc.)

This brings to another challenge:

NON REGULATION and lack of Quality Control

- The **abundance of information** from the expanding number of digital media sources available makes it more difficult to regulate and sometimes to control (for instance Pornography cases on internet).
- The power of media has also been challenged in recent times by what is known as **alternative media**.
- With alternative media, one has to be careful, as people generally subscribe to those with bias, hate and antisocial tendencies.

Another challenge is the power that
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS have

- ❖ In many countries, Press is in real danger of being overrun by interest groups and being made dysfunctional.
- ❖ Indeed in many countries, most of the newspapers are controlled by business magnates that simply promote their interests

Finally, a great challenge is that of

TECHNOLOGY

- Satellite television versus terrestrial television
- Internet-based publishing (e.g., blogging, social media) vs. traditional publishing:
- Internet, anonymity software and strong cryptography
- Voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) vs. conventional telephony:

In PRACTICE: FREEDOM IN CANADA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

In CANADA

- ✓ **Freedom of expression in Canada** is protected as a "fundamental freedom" by Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- ✓ Section 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that everyone has "the freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication".

To sum up

- The press is the defender and the protector of the rights and liberties of the people.

But

- At the same time, the press must not fail to follow its code of conduct and misuse the freedom.

Thank You