



# Make Yourself a Nuisance

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AT A TIME when, in far too many parts of the world the press and radio are state controlled, and when the expression of contrary political opinions is punished with imprisonment or death, it may at first seem unjustified and ungrateful to suggest that we in Britain enjoy anything less than a free forum for opinion in the national press and television.

But freedom in practice is always really a matter of degree. A canary having escaped from its cage may consider itself free and be quite happy about it; but we know that its freedom is limited, because the window and door of the room are locked. We must not allow our repugnance at such unhappy conditions in other countries to blind us to the necessity of constant vigilance in defending and preserving the liberties we still have and of striving to make good any deficiencies in our principal means of communication.

The deficiencies may not be too obvious at first, probably because the disappearance of so many of our civil liberties during the past thirty years has been so gently contrived as to be painless to all but a discerning few. Or, if the going of them has been noticed at all by the many, they have been shrugged off with a resignation which by now may almost be considered a part of our national character.

It must be agreed that the press bears certain obligations towards society: it should faithfully and truthfully report events of public interest, give fair comment upon them, publish with impartiality and without mutilation the views expressed by its readers, and present as nearly as possible a day to day picture of social conditions.

While the first of these obligations is generally fulfilled by the daily papers, there is in most of them a strong bias towards the sensational, too often at the cost of other news which may be just as important. For example, last May in Paris a young man named Daniel Cohn-Bendit was given by the press a totally unwarranted prominence merely because of his association with mob violence. (He was even interviewed at length on television when he visited Britain—and thus received publicity for which many a hard-working, conscientious and law-abiding social reformer would give his ears). Every word and gesture uttered by Tariq Ali is painstakingly reported, and on the occasions when Colin Jordan does or says anything, he is similarly fav-

oured.

The total faithful following of all these people probably does not exceed a few hundred, but the doings and sayings of much larger groups go unreported. It would seem, therefore, that if you want to get your voice heard and your views disseminated in the national press, you must in some way make yourself a public nuisance. It is because of the publicity which the press freely hands out to these vociferous minorities that they are able to continue to exploit the vast majority of their fellows, whose views and grievances are just as worthy of being heard, but who prefer to observe the law and respect public order.

Pressure of time will be pleaded when refusing to send reporters to meetings, conferences and so on when the proceedings are likely to be peaceful and quiet. However, let any person in the audience throw a firework or molest a speaker, and reporters will appear from nowhere to report the incident. Up to that moment it mattered not at all what words of wisdom flowed from many learned lips.

Do people really clamour for such sensationalism in their newspapers, or do they accept and expect it as a normal and inevitable way of presenting news? Is it not possible that most people merely want to learn the facts?

How much of this is due to editorial policy dictated by private interests (including advertisers who often pay the piper) or to a justified fear of losing sales? Would it be a good thing to have at least one newspaper which could be run by people of all political views or none? But then only the few would buy it, advertisers would not use it, and so it would be too costly. Look what happened to *The New Daily*.

Perhaps there is no answer to this problem except to try to increase the sale of *LAND & LIBERTY* and other independent journals!