

CENSORSHIP

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Editor

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kiosks to withdraw obscene literature from circulation. Cheap fiction, anthologies of bawdy jokes, and obscene calendars were their initial targets. What was unusual in censorship history was that what began as a private initiative was taken up and institutionalized by the state. A state committee came into legal existence in 1927, supervised by the minister of education, Janis Rainis. Ironically enough, he had himself been a victim of censorship when his poems were banned by tsarist authorities before World War I.

Offensive literature was now listed in the *Valdibes Vestnesis* (Government Herald), powerfully suggesting that bookshops should not stock it. The list was drawn up by the committee, which consisted of officials from the Ministry of Education as well as representatives from Latvia's community of authors, artists, teachers, and publishers. Although Latvia saw frequent changes of government, and there were far-reaching changes in the composition of the legislature between 1927 and 1930, all governments continued to back the committee's work. With frequent cabinet changes, officials took more control of routine business, and the committee acted as a rubber stamp for their actions. Targets expanded from *Pinkerton Detective* and Chicago gangster novels to popular medical texts that discussed birth control and abortion. So-called "coming of age" novels were also targeted.

The case of one such book underlines the arbitrary power of the censor. In 1931, Janis Luke's novel *Musu valodas ermi* (Our Language's Buffoons) drew acclaim from several literary critics in Latvia's leading newspapers, including even the mouthpiece of the conservative Agrarian Party. The book describes a frustrated young man dealing with sex, love, and political hypocrisy

in a provincial Latvian town. Although some scenes describe the main character's easygoing attitude to sex, critics also detected, and applauded, an indictment of Latvia's political status quo. The committee duly found the book obscene and banned its sale. The author appealed against the decision and won; this was the first time that such an appeal had succeeded. However, the committee and the minister of the interior refused to accept the decision, and continued to list the book as banned. Under pressure from a committee of the legislature, as well as from Latvia's highest court, the minister grudgingly struck the book from the banned list on 23 November 1932, but did not publish the favourable verdict in the government press. The book was legally absolved, but remained banned in practice.

The committee banned fewer books between 1932 and 1934, the year when a successful authoritarian coup led to a reinvigoration of its activities. The political and social leanings of the committee were similar to those of the new regime, and important committee members filled posts in the government. The committee's work ended at the same time as the authoritarian regime, with the Soviet occupation of 1940, although it continued to meet and ban books periodically until 1938. The committee was not formally dissolved, but simply lapsed into inactivity because new regimes, both Soviet and Nazi, accomplished the committee's goal of "protecting youth" by other means.

ALDIS PURS

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THOMAS JEFFERSON

US political theorist and president, 1743-1826

Thomas Jefferson, main author of the Declaration of Independence and third president of the US, was a man of broad learning as well as a man of action: a classical scholar who knew Greek and Latin as well as several modern languages, he was also a naturalist, lawyer, architect, political theorist, book collector, and educator. Jefferson's views on freedom of speech, conscience, press, and assembly inspired both American and French revolutionaries.

To Jefferson, liberty was both the root and fruit of morality. Describing freedom as the "firstborn daughter of science", he conceived of freedom of thought, belief, and expression as part of the natural and "inalienable" rights of men. Conversely, he regarded censorship as an abridgement of human reason and an impediment to moral progress.

Jefferson considered "the American experiment", the founding of the new republic in 1776, to be a test of whether "man may be governed by reason and truth". He regarded freedom of the press as an essential constituent of this experiment because it keeps "all avenues to truth" open: it is therefore, the first shut up by "those who fear the investigation of their actions".

When the Constitution of the United States, the oldest federalist constitution in existence, was drafted in 1787, Jefferson

expressed concern that specific provisions were not included to guarantee freedom of conscience, press, and assembly, and the rights of habeas corpus. He was a strong advocate for the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the constitution, which were ratified in 1791. The First Amendment provided the most radical protection of freedom of the press that had ever been formally inscribed into law. It prohibited the federal government from making any law "abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press". It also secured religious freedom, and rights of assembly and petition.

In 1798, when the administration of president John Adams passed the Alien Act, which authorized deportation of foreign radicals, liberals, propagandists, and agitators, and the Sedition Act, which curbed the "licentiousness" of the press, Jefferson and James Madison (1751-1836) invoked states rights and the constitutional limits on the power of the president to contain the administration's attempt to suppress freedom of expression. The Sedition Act allowed the administration to fine, imprison, and prosecute any opposition writer; it had the effect of silencing critics for the remainder of Adams's administration. Jefferson compared this period in American history (1798-1800) to the Inquisition and described the administration's

actions as a "witch-hunt". Jefferson was elected president in 1800, succeeding Adams; and Congress generally supported his platform of reform and amnesty for the victims of the Alien and Sedition Acts.

Jefferson's salutary description of the mission of the free press has become a cherished canon of the professional ideology of journalism in the US:

The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter.

Jefferson added a singular qualification to his brief for press freedom, "that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them". Jefferson's advocacy of universal literacy and his interests in developing the Library of Congress and the University of Virginia were part and parcel of his commitments to advancing human reason and moral progress.

The contradictions within Jefferson's thinking and the gaps that separate his theories and practices have been widely noted. Jefferson agonized over the morality of slave-holding but held slaves throughout his life. He celebrated the perfectibility of human reason but dismissed the urban masses as debauched mobs. He advocated the rule of law but recommended placing any white woman who gave birth to a child of mixed race "out of the protection of laws". He regarded education as the road to equality but proposed a two-tier system of education in which the labouring classes were to be trained to follow, and the learned classes, professionals, and the independently wealthy were to be educated to share in conducting the affairs of the nation.

His approach to censorship was, by contemporary standards, also marked by contradiction. Jefferson argued that in a democracy the people are the only legitimate censors. When, however, the free press used its critical powers against president Jefferson's policies, he expressed the view that "a few prosecutions of the most eminent offenders would have a wholesome effect in restoring the integrity of the presses". He declared that he was "really mortified" to discover that in the United States of America a civil magistrate could order a book suppressed, and claimed that it was the "duty" of every patriot to buy a copy of the censored book "in vindication of his right to buy, and read what he pleases". When it came to female readers, however, Jefferson advocated censorship. He recommended

prohibiting women from reading all novels except selected works by Marmontel, Edgeworth, and Gentilis, and he advised severe restrictions on their exposure to poetry. He believed that too much reading would undermine the moral virtues of women and make them unfit for their domestic and maternal duties.

The American experiment was a work-in-progress during Jefferson's lifetime. The inconsistencies in his thinking made his democratic covenant a restricted covenant. The civil rights movements of the 20th century build upon the Jeffersonian vision by exposing the blind spots in his concepts of humanity, reason, and morality.

SUE CURRY JANSEN

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ANDRÁS JELES

Hungarian writer, and film and theatre director, 1945-

Jeles's films and theatre productions are concerned with the theoretical problems of the possibility of representation. They implicitly criticize totalitarian regimes that impose preordained historical or personal narratives upon individuals.

Jeles studied Hungarian literature and cultural management at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, then turned his attention to film direction at the Academy of Film Art. His films

earned him early recognition among film and literary critics, but appeared elitist to the general public. This complex response might be attributed in part to his artistic credo, which emphasizes his dissatisfaction with the traditional parasitic dependence of film upon literature. Jeles wishes to legitimize film as an independent medium, whose objectives are fundamentally different from the visual representation of previously