COMMUNICATION IS FREEDOM: KARL MARX ON PRESS FREEDOM AND CENSORSHIP

HANNO HARDT

Abstract

Karl Marx addresses issues of freedom and communication during his brief career as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* and *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne, Germany between 1843 and 1849 with remarkable clarity and intensity. His quest for freedom and the disclosure of truth are cornerstones of resistance to official attempts to manipulate the understanding of freedom as license to act and to suggest that truth is relative and determinable by public authorities. Marx identifies editorial practices with freedom of expression that belongs to working journalists as an individual or collective right that governs the relations between journalists and public and private authorities, including the owners of the press itself; freedom of the press, on the other hand, as an economic consideration is a professional prerequisite for intellectual labour. His ideas offer real alternatives to current debates over freedom of the press and contemporary conditions of journalism: to sustain democracy requires freedom of expression and the protection of the public sphere, including the media, particularly from forms of censorship that arise with the control of intellectual labour by those who own or influence the means of public communication.

Hanno Hardt is Professor of Communication and Media Studies at University of Iowa and University of Ljubljana, email: Hanno-Hardt@uiowa.edu.

The Context

The writings of Karl Marx inform the intellectual discourse of the twentieth century — ranging from interpretations by Antonio Gramsci or Georg Lukács, and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, to post-World War II re-readings by Louis Althusser, among others — which confirm the enduring relevance of Marxist thought in a contemporary world. The emerging reproductions of "Marxism" constitute an explicatory narrative, grounded in the notion of critique, and intent on proclaiming the liberating values of a Marxist perspective on the social and economic conditions of modern society.

Throughout this time, however, not much attention has been paid to the intellectual work of the younger Marx on issues of freedom and communication, although the centrality of communication as a social process had been established by a number of contemporary social theorists — beginning with the assessment of the press and its impact on the formation of public opinion by nineteenth century German political economists (Hardt 1979). And yet, his earlier writings on press freedom and his involvement — as an intellectual, journalist, and editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* and *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in Germany[1] — in political journalism as an ideological struggle against the authority of the Prussian state do offer sufficient evidence of his concerns regarding public communication, the expression of oppositional ideas, and the importance of the press as a democratic institution; these concerns are addressed by him in the 1840s with topics ranging from press-government relations to commercial pressures and focus on press freedom and censorship, in particular.[2] They appear in contrast to his later theoretical work, which does not specifically consider communicative practices or expand on the relationship between communication and society, although Marx remains keenly aware of the need for an engaged press and continues to appreciate journalistic practice as political practice, even in later years.

Marx focuses his attention on the idea of freedom — the prerequisite for a climate of emancipation and democratic practice — to address the specific need for a free press in the context of his professional work as a journalist and political activist. Thus, his discussion of press freedom is primarily directed against external restrictions, including censorship by the state; it is a polemic against state authority based on concrete, existential threats to the well being of an oppositional press and not a debate particularly related to the editorial practices within the organisation. Indeed, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was operated under the "dictatorship" of Marx, as Engels suggests (Fetscher 1969, 147), based on his leadership qualifications, clear vision, and personal confidence. Marx appreciates the relations of (political) expression and publicity (in the form of the press), and projects a model of intellectual authority (together with his staff members) that captures his readers.

Among Marx's political goals is the emancipation of the working class with the aid of democratic reforms. For instance, since the constitutional prerequisites for a democratic existence, like freedom of the press, or freedom of association and assembly, were rights the bourgeoisie had failed to win for itself or for the working class, they become the editorial mission of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in the context of promoting democracy — "but a democracy which emphasised throughout the proletarian character" (Fetscher 1969, 146) — and in pursuit of a strictly political agenda.

Engels characterises the tone of the newspaper as neither "celebratory, serious, nor enthusiastic." Instead, political opponents were considered despicable and treated with extreme disdain. Individuals, organisations, and institutions could not escape the scrutiny of editorial observation and analysis, while rifts between the petit bourgeoisie and the working class were bridged, because "the less we allowed the petit bourgeoisie to misunderstand our proletarian democracy, the more submissive and pliable it became" (1969, 149). Marx is unrelenting in his criticism and resolved to advance the idea of democracy through a discussion of freedom.

The topic of press freedom takes on a particularly relevant and important role with the realisation that public communication — achieved in and with the institution of the press — and the social and political well being of society are closely connected; in fact, the condition of communication in society determines the condition of society itself.[3] For this reason, society must insist on the unimpeded workings of a press system that advances an emancipatory cause and reinforces progress as a politically crucial provider of a general forum for the public exchange of ideas. And ideas count more than the particular social circumstances of an individual, for instance, because for Marx the press is the "most general way for individuals to communicate their intellectual being. It knows no reputation of a person, but only the reputation of intelligence" (*RZ* 139, 19/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 94).

His appreciation of newspapers as instruments of public communication and the protection of a free flow of ideas constitute relevant dimensions of his journalism which is driven by the belief that a revolutionary movement must participate in public life and educate the proletariat. This means for Marx that freedom of the press becomes a necessary condition for expressing and reinforcing (oppositional) ideas and represents a basic requirement of his editorial mission in a political environment in which the idea of freedom had remained a figment of the imagination for most Germans, or at least a sentimental notion; according to Marx, Germans respect ideas so much that they rarely realise them (*RZ* 139, 19/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 88-89).

Censorship as Spiritual Slavery

In his arguments, Marx is focused on the political or legal position of the Prussian state rather than on the economic conditions for a free press. His pursuit of freedom is accompanied by the search for truth as yet another objective in Marx's theory and practice of nineteenth century journalism; it is the pursuit of the real conditions of the social, economic, and political environment that defines the work of journalists and characterises the mission of the press. For instance, in his critique of press practices under Prussian rule, Marx reveals two measures of truth that are applied particularly to the coverage of foreign and domestic affairs, respectively. He finds that frequently speculative reports from abroad — open to almost immediate revision — contain "factual lies" which are raised to the level of truth and remain unassailable and uncontested by public authorities, like censors; domestic reporting, on the other hand, results in immediate condemnation and censorial reproach. Marx asks, what is wrong with attempting to share volatile situations and activities abroad with readers — history in the making — through news from far-away places, while rejecting the representation of similar historical processes in its domestic coverage (*RZ* 8, 8/1/43; Fetscher 1969, 122)? His question is based on the realisation that establishing truths may involve more than the mere

identification of the fact, but entails an examination of truth claims through human practice; thus, he demands that "the investigation of truth must be honest itself, the real investigation is the unfolded truth whose disconnected parts are combined in the results" (Fetscher 1969, 23).

His quest for freedom and the disclosure of truth become the cornerstones of resistance to official attempts to manipulate both, the understanding of freedom as license to act, and the notion of truth as relative and determinable by official, public authorities. Accordingly, censorship appears as official guidance, disguised in the form of instructions to improve the practice of journalism by defining the nature of truth.

Censorship of newspapers and other periodical publications was a fact of life in the Prussian state of the 1840s. Koszyk (1966, 89-92) observes that the conditions of the press in Prussia during the 1840s gave no reasons for optimism, although press freedom had increased by 1842. The newspaper landscape is dominated by a servile press, which remains intimidated and ineffective, fearing censorship and termination by the government; Marx relates in one of his frequent and sharp, if not sarcastic, editorial reactions that the "German daily press is the weakest, most lethargic and timid institution under the sun! The greatest injustices could occur before its eyes, or be committed against it, while it remains quiet and secretive; if one would not hear it by chance, one would never hear it from the press . . ." (*NRZ* 246, 15/3/49; Fetscher 1969, 182-183). Newspapers in the Rhine province, in contrast, are moderately liberal, and the *Rheinische Zeitung* emerges initially as a formula for liberal journalism elsewhere only to become — after Marx's rise to the editorship in October 1842 — an leading exempla of a political newspaper in an era of a politicised German press (Koszyk 1966, 98).

At the time, edicts asserting the power of authorities also defined the limits of journalistic practice, including the employment of suitable editors, and reduced the private decisions of publishers to acts of compliance with official pronouncements. For instance, Marx ridicules official demands to hire only "respectable" individuals with scientific expertise as editors, whose "position and character guarantee the seriousness of their activities and the loyalty of their thinking" (Fetscher 1969, 36). He immediately asks whether censors have such expert backgrounds, and if they do, why don't they act as writers? "What would be better than censorship to end the confusion of the press, when these civil servants — overpowering in numbers, more powerful with their scientific genius — would rise and — with their weight — crush those miserable writers, who practice only in one genre and even then without an officially recognised skill" (Fetscher 1969, 37)?

Likewise, in the context of debating freedom and censorship, Prussian authorities had created the spectre of "good" and "bad" newspapers, thus producing images of either a supportive (good) or jealous (bad) press. Marx, however, wants to differentiate between the rational and moral (free) press and the shameless, "perfumed miscarriage" of a (censored) press. Moreover, he concludes that "the free press remains good even when its products are bad, because these products are deviations from the nature of a free press." On the other hand, "the censored press remains bad, even when its products are good, because these products are only good insofar as they represent the free press within the censored press, and insofar as it is not in their character to be products of a censored press" (*RZ* 132, 12/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 72-73).

Official differentiations (good or bad) or characterisations (real or false) of the press imply definitions and intentions that remain unanswered. Marx wants to know the "real" press, that is, he insists on inquiring about which newspaper represents reality and which one the favoured reality and asks how are distinctions made, who makes them, and where is the press in these deliberations about its very own existence? He concludes that labelling newspapers and confronting the conduct of the press are real challenges to press freedom, because "Whenever a specific form of freedom is rejected, freedom in general is rejected and can only lead a quasi-existence, and wherever unfreedom will be active happens by pure chance. Unfreedom is the rule, and freedom is the exception to chance and arbitrariness" (*RZ* 139, 19/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 98).

Although Marx articulates his position vis-à-vis issues of press freedom regularly in the columns of his newspaper, the debates of press freedom in the Rhine Province Assembly constitute his immediate reason for developing the most coherent and sustained arguments in a series of articles written between May 5 and May 19, 1842. They provide the political, historical foundation of his arguments concerning a free press in the context of a larger commitment to individual and collective social, political, and economic freedom.

His own experience as well as his knowledge of intellectual working conditions elsewhere — in France, Holland, England, Switzerland or the United States, for instance — and the practice of journalism, specifically, also reveal the depth of his interest and provide a measure of his concerns which he expresses eloquently when he writes that " one must have loved freedom of the press, like beauty, to be able to defend it. I feel that the existence of whatever I really love is necessary and needed, and without it my own being is neither fulfilled, satisfied, nor complete" (*RZ* 125, 5/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 49). Marx suggests here a close (if not loving) relationship between press freedom and a full intellectual life — grounded in the proximity of freedom and life, in general. Love anticipates commitment, thus, it would be difficult for anyone to fight for a free press without a sense of commitment, since those who never desire freedom of the press as a necessary condition of their own intellectual lives, and whose rationality prevents an emotional attachment to the notion of a free press, will treat this issue like any other "exotic" phenomenon — as a removed, external episode beyond the boundaries of their own existential interests.

But Marx insists on the centrality of the press in the pursuit of freedom and maintains that the "press, in general, is a realisation of human freedom. Where there is a press, there is also press freedom." He implies that freedom is ever present and assailed only when it is someone else's freedom. Thus, since "every kind of freedom has always existed, either as privilege or universal right," the question of press freedom becomes a question of whether it is a privilege or a common right, or, as Marx proclaims, "whether press freedom is the privilege of specific individuals or the privilege of the human mind" (*RZ* 132, 12/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 69).

Censorship, on the other hand, constitutes critique as official monopoly, resists an open exchange of ideas, and opposes any notion of public critique, or the process of reflection and articulation, that is inherent in the idea of intellectual work and the practice of a free press. Censorship contradicts the very character of the press; it does not emerge from the idea of freedom — which is part of the character of the press to provide access to divergent ideas — but promotes consent by suppression.

While censorship punishes freedom, laws are expressions of freedom, which may call into questions specific press practices. His approach to the notion of legal sanctions, in general, is characterised by his interpretation of laws, which do not address practice but conscience as positive sanctions of lawlessness. Thus, censorship constitutes lawless behaviour, and lawlessness warrants the attention of journalism, which represents the spirit, and the conscience of the people. Marx allows no compromise and condemns any and all attacks on the press and the work of individual journalists. He insists, for instance, that press laws treat freedom as a normal condition of the press, and consequently breaking these laws suggests a violation of such a freedom; therefore, legal codes are the "bible of freedom of a people" as "press laws are the legal recognition of press freedom." Marx considers press law a right, because it constitutes a positive existence of freedom and must be present, although it may never be applied. Censorship, however, like slavery, cannot become legal, although it may be present as a law (*RZ* 132, 12/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 77). Thus, censorship is not a law, but a police order; yet even in this form, it is a poor regulation, because "it does not accomplish what it sets out to accomplish, and it does not want to succeed in what it achieves" (*RZ*, 135, 15/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 79).

In fact, censorship has detrimental effects on society, since every uncensored publication, regardless of its quality, is an extraordinary event and produces martyrs, while press freedom eliminates the aura of fame surrounding a print product in the hands of censors. Moreover, a censored press is demoralising, since it is inseparable from hypocrisy, the source of its problems. Marx notices that under a system of censorship, the government "hears only *its own voice*, knows that it hears only its own voice, and is yet fixed on the delusion to hear the voice of the people and demands from the people to fall for the trick." The result is a deterioration of the relationship between people and politics and the disillusionment of journalism; both, people and the press must live with and by lies. He concludes, "since people must consider uncensored publications as lawless, they will get used to considering lawlessness as free, freedom as lawless, and lawfulness as unfreedom. Thus, censorship kills the public spirit." Indeed, censorship is the unrelenting attack on the rights of private persons and on the spread of ideas, in particular (*RZ* 135; 15/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 83-84). But above all, "censorship does not avoid the struggle, but makes it one-sided, turns an open struggle into a hidden one, and turns a struggle over principles into a struggle between a non-violent principle and power without principle" (*RZ* 12/5/42 quoted in Koszyk 1966, 11).

The presence of censorship creates instant problems for writers and intellectuals, who are identified with language and the expression of ideas and whose activities extend across cultural or political borders. Marx addresses the problem of authorship — and influence — from outside Germany, reminiscent of his own existence as an expatriate intellectual during the years leading up to his editorship of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848 and suggestive of the concrete conditions of intellectual life in Europe. Under such historical circumstances, Prussian authors have a choice; they either publish their ideas under the threat of censorship at home or move beyond the borders and publish them under the specific conditions of a particular state; in either case, however, authors are under surveillance by the Prussian state. Indeed, Marx notes that publications abroad will meet more frequently with objections from authorities, because they have not been scrutinised by domestic censors and are, therefore, allegedly liable to contain injurious material.

Free Press as "People's Press"

Marx addresses the relationship of press and people or nation as a crucial connection between the spiritual and material spheres of everyday life. Being an integral part of society also means that a free press represents not only ideas and ideologies of people, but also reflects engagement and participation. Marx concludes that because of its proximity to the people, the press reflects the real life with all of its natural contradictions, trials and errors, and because of its tender age (as a press for the masses rather than special interests), this press is liable to make mistakes, overstate, exaggerate, even distort events, only to learn from its practices. These are shortcomings, and Marx notes that people recognise their own conditions in the flawed performance of their newspapers and know that they will eventually rise to represent their moral spirit. Indeed, he concludes that attacks on the people's press is a political acknowledgement and a significant initial recognition of "its presence, its reality, and its power" (*RZ* 1, 1/1/43; Fetscher 1969, 117).

Thus, when Marx uses the term "*Volkspresse*" (people's press) he refers to newspapers as representative examples of social, cultural, and political movements and mirrors of societal growth and intellectual advancement with all of their imperfections, failures, and successes. The press of this type functions neither as an authoritative instrument of elitist control, nor as a publication for and by the people (like *Le Prolétaire*, 1878-84, a weekly produced exclusively by manual labourers in Paris; see: Engels 1967/68c, I, 144), but constitutes a public sphere which accommodates the voice of the people, that is the working class, with its own tolerance for contradiction and dissent. The notion of "*Volkspresse*" implies a special relationship between people and the press that finds its expression in the editorial attention paid to the interests of people and suggests a specific, nurturing and protective role for newspapers as an extension of the public sphere in the process of public communication. It stands in opposition to a bourgeois press (and its notion of public opinion) and makes the idea of the bourgeois public sphere problematic for Marx, who argues that it contradicts the principle of universal accessibility. Indeed, according to Habermas (1989, 124), his critique of political economy "demolished all fictions to which the idea of the public sphere of civil society appealed."

Specifically, Marx proposes that the free press is a public institution that unites people, confirms their self-confidence, and provides surveillance. He declares quite polemically that "a free press is the ever-present, vigilant eye of the people's spirit, the embodiment of a people's trust in itself, the communication link that binds the individual to state and world, the embodied culture that transforms material struggles into spiritual ones while idealising their crude material form. It is the people's outspoken self-confession, whose redeeming power is well known. It is the spiritual mirror, in which a people discover itself, and insight is the first prerequisite of wisdom. It is the public spirit, which may be delivered to every cottage cheaper than coal gas. It is multifarious, ubiquitous, and omniscient. It is the ideal world, which emerges from the real world only to return to it as an enriched spirit, newly charged" (*RZ* 135, 15/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 80).

Tracing the concrete historical roots of press freedom, Marx contemplates the conditions of freedom in a number of countries to find that the United States enjoy the "natural phenomenon" of a free press in its purest form. Yet, because literature and, with it, intellectual growth constitute the real historical determinants of a free

press, he concludes that Germany offers a sounder historical basis for the rise of press freedom (*RZ* 135, 15/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 83). By doing so, Marx confirms that the journalist as writer and journalism as intellectual labour are the real, historically grounded, definitional elements of the modern press. However, an increasingly commercialised world witnesses the turn from literature to trade as a source of inspiration and offers a different historical explanation — one favoured by some of his contemporaries, like Albert Schäffle and Karl Knies (Hardt 1979). Marx confronts this perspective and argues that even as a commercial enterprise, the press remains different from other business ventures — since it involves intellectual (*Kopfarbeit*) rather than physical labour (*Arm- und Beinarbeit*). In fact, he finds that "the emancipation of arm and leg becomes humanly significant with the emancipation of the head" (*RZ* 139, 19/5/42, Fetscher 1969, 88).

Consequently, commercial freedom cannot be press freedom, since "every particular sphere of freedom is freedom of a particular sphere, just as a specific way of life is the way of life of a particular nature" (*RZ* 139, 19/5/42, Fetscher 1969, 90). Thus, liberal ideas of free trade, for instance, do not meet the requirement of genuine freedom; Marx insists on separating discussions of freedom that relate, if not combine, different spheres of human activity and, therefore, rejects the idea that press freedom is a category of commercial freedom. He illustrates his argument by suggesting, for instance, that it cannot be that the carpenter, who demands the freedom for his craftsmanship, is given the freedom of the philosopher. In fact, "the first freedom of the press is not to be a business." If the press is seen as a business, it becomes a commercial concern to be assigned to the sphere of printers or booksellers rather than journalists or intellectuals, Commercial freedom, however, is not freedom of the press (*RZ* 139, 19/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 92).

His remarks reflect not only the intellectual tradition of German journalism, but this perspective has significant consequences for considering the notion of press freedom, because it separates effectively the practice of journalism — as intellectual labour — from the institutional existence of the press — as commercial enterprise; ultimately Marx identifies newswork — and editorial practices, in general — with freedom of expression that belongs to those working as journalists, while the economic concerns of the press are to be addressed from a different position. Freedom of the press must be understood as a (desirable or ideal) professional prerequisite for intellectual labour. By privileging the latter, Marx creates optimal theoretical conditions for the practice of journalism, since the press — as an institution — has no control over editorial functions (newswork as such) but serves journalists as a medium for public communication. Therefore, the notion of press freedom implies the achievement of freedom of expression; for Marx it is an individual or collective right that governs the relations between journalists — and intellectuals generally — and public and private authorities, including the owners of the press itself. In this sense, his writings on press freedom are also aimed at the emancipation of newsworkers from the ownership of the means of communication, that is, from the domination by publishers and stockholders.

Implicit in his arguments for press freedom (or freedom of expression) also is a belief in the importance of ideas and their consequences for the well being of society. Marx writes from the vantage point of an intellectual who lives from the power of his words and relies on the need to communicate freely. He understands the potential effects of the press — or any other medium, including books — because

he believes that the force of ideas can change the world. Thus, an intellectual life — that is, the quality of ideas, their disclosure and dissemination — contributes immeasurably to the cause of society. But as theories come to life in practice, beliefs need implementation; Marx is prepared to act, and his own work as journalist and editor illustrates the necessary relationship between ideas and actions (or theory and practice). As a result, intellectual labour — and the process of communication, in general — demand protection (by press laws and through the vigilance of intellectuals, and journalists, in particular) to ensure progress and maximise the potential for change.

Marx treats press freedom as a necessary condition for a democratic society and, together with freedom of association and assembly, for instance, as a political goal. He demonstrates through his editorial practice, including the actual infractions and his numerous court appearances, the concrete foundations of his theoretical discussions of the nature of a free press and the location of press freedom as an unalienable right among other freedoms in the catalogue of human rights. His theoretical writings are tied into the political agenda of emancipating the working class.

Indeed, press freedom is a prerequisite condition for competing political beliefs and struggling ideologies in the public sphere. It reinforces conflict and is a crucial element in defining hegemony, which relies on communication and exchange. Press freedom suggests access not only to contesting ideas, but also to the public discourse of society, which is strengthened by the potential of participation. Furthermore, protecting the process of public communication encourages alternative constructions of reality by confirming the merits of different social, political, or cultural forces. At the same time, however, press freedom works only for those who have the means of communication at their disposal, e.g., access to the media or sufficient public or private support to sustain the financial burden of a publishing enterprise. Speaking about the role of capital in the bourgeoisie's rise to power, Engels (1967/68d, II, 57) remarks that "freedom of the press is a bourgeois privilege, because printing requires money and buyers of the product, and these buyers need money, too."

Marx is keenly aware of these conditions as editor and publisher of a newspaper whose specific political goals differentiate between the emancipation of the bourgeois class and the working class, but whose articulation of press freedom reflects an influence of nineteenth century liberalism. The latter champions the protection of the individual (politically and economically), advocates democracy, and promotes freedom of thought, speech, and press — or cultural production — in a bourgeois state. Marx employs the ideology of an enlightened, liberal bourgeoisie, whose assistance he sought in the fight against Prussian authority and in accordance with his long-term political strategy. But he seems to embrace liberalism only to undermine it with his insistence on press freedom in the service of an emancipatory struggle of the working class. According to Engels, the political interests of communists in Germany at the time were best served by supporting or collaborating with the bourgeoisie in its fight for power without falling for its promises to the proletariat — and to overturn the regime of a victorious bourgeoisie as soon as possible (1967/68e, II, 14).In fact, a few years later, in 1850, Marx (1976, 50-51) addresses the Communist League and urges the working class to remain politically independent and to "make the revolution permanent." He explains, "With us it is not a matter of reforming private property, but of abolishing it; not of hushing up the class antagonism, but of abolishing the classes; not of ameliorating the existing society, but of establishing a new one."

Nevertheless, Marx's writings on freedom and the communication of ideas and against censorship and the authority of the Prussian state contain the vocabulary of mid-nineteenth century liberalism — with references to democracy, freedom, and the role of the press, for instance — and reflect the idea of the state as a facilitator of individual happiness.[4] He uses the language of liberalism to particularly address pertinent issues regarding freedom of the press in ways that could help enlist bourgeois support for his specific political agenda, a strengthening of the working-class movement. But liberalism as a doctrinal aspect of capitalism does not embrace the totalising approach of socialism; the latter insists on the emancipation of working people, equality, and classlessness in the spirit of a perfect communal existence and certainly in opposition to capitalist individualism, which specifies and categorises the conditions of freedom and subordinates the individual to state or bureaucracy. Marx rejects the rather narrow (liberal) position that exchange relations (that is, economic relations) are compatible with freedom, since genuine freedom is self-determination. Instead, the earlier Marx follows a Western, humanistic tradition in his own intellectual practice by constructing the individual as an independent, productive, and non-alienated human being, while his political objectives help prepare the foundation of socialism as it would evolve from his later writings (and the work of Engels).

Furthermore, Marx understood that as a determinant of political processes, the press produces and reinforces specific ideological positions; in fact, it becomes an instrument of propaganda, agitation, and organisation — as Lenin would announce a generation later in his instructions to the Communist press — at a point in history when the era of a Russian bourgeois press comes to an end. However, Marx does not theorise these functions, he merely generates and applies the power of the press based on his intellectual strength — and the tenacity of his editorial staff — to pursue his political mission. Indeed, his writings on press freedom expose considerable differences between his own understanding of a socialist press and the appropriation of his ideas by Lenin: they may serve as evidence of the misinterpretation and (deliberate) misrepresentation of Marx by Soviet-style communism in the 1920s and beyond. While his critique of capitalism includes, by necessity, a radical reconfiguration of the press and the role of unrestrained intellectual labour, Soviet communism treats the press — or intellectual practice — in the spirit of capitalism, that is, at the expense of genuine human emancipation and in favour of state directed goals, and promotes socialism by decree. Rosa Luxemburg (1976, 256), for instance, revisits the original ideas of socialism when she demands not only public control but also "the most unlimited, broadest democracy and public opinion."

Marx appreciates the potential effectiveness of the press to assist in educating the working class and reinforcing a nascent political movement. His journalism explains distant events (in India, China, Russia, or the United States) in terms of close-by, relevant affairs; thus, he applies historical thinking in his conclusions about the forces of capitalism elsewhere to encourage criticism and participation of the proletariat in the process of public communication. But his journalism is not only the expression of a socialist ideology, it is also the practice of translating theoretical thought into the language of everyday life where ideology becomes a material force with a potential of rallying the masses.[5]

Marx shares with contemporary German political economists, like Schäffle and Knies, an understanding of the press as a pivotal institution in modern society, but

he also knows about its potential as a social and political means of persuasion, and therefore, as an attractive, if not indispensable weapon against political authority and for the rule of democratic ideas. But he also comes down on the side of press freedom in ways that preclude later interpretations of the role and function of the press in Soviet style socialism — e.g., the bureaucratic subordination of the means of communication — with a clear sense of the importance of ideas and their weight in the war against all forms of suppression and control. Because the goal of socialism, according to Marx, is to generate circumstances under which the individual overcomes alienation from work, from others, and from nature to return to the self and thus, to independence.

For Marx communication is freedom, when socialism creates the conditions of a new social order in which the individual realises himself; self-realisation, however, depends on the production of ideas and — ultimately — consciousness by individuals who live in communication with their surroundings. To communicate under these circumstances also means the realisation of personal freedom and autonomy. For this reason, the process of communication is typically secured by a social order that advances the emancipation of the individual — including the right of communication — and charges the press with providing institutional support for the self-expression of a conscious existence. Implied in this development is a role for the intellectual, and therefore, for the presence of theory at the point of creation of a democratic society.

Thus, Marx insists that "freedom remains freedom, whether it expresses itself in printer's ink, a parcel of land, consciousness, or in a political meeting" (*RZ* 139, 19/5/42; Fetscher 1969, 99); but it is always individual freedom, that is the process of personal communication that is his concern. In this sense, communication is freedom only when emancipated from the commercial or political authority of the institution of the press.

Marx also reveals in these early writings on press freedom and public communication his thinking about the social (or cultural) concept of the individual; by privileging expression (and the role of the press) Marx acknowledges the centrality of communication in the process of self-realisation. The individual does not exist except in terms of social relations; praxis is co-operative and existence interdependent. Thus, when individuality is realised through interaction, language and communication become the means by which individuals realise their being and engage in co-operative activities that constitute the essence of society. Human existence is an ongoing social process fuelled by the potential of communication. These nascent ideas are confirmed throughout his writings in later years. Their contemporary relevance, particularly as they pertain to the future of journalism, however, seems clear: to sustain democracy requires freedom of expression and the protection of the public sphere, including the media, particularly from those forms of censorship that arise with the control of intellectual labour by those who own or influence the public means of communication.

Implicit in his discussions of press freedom, and in his struggle for survival as a critical voice in the sea of bland and conformist Prussian journalism, is a belief that newspapers are more than the industrial conveyor belts of a new information society. For Marx they reproduce ideologies, create sentiments, and reflect the spirit of the people. In addition, a free press also represents cultural progress with its unlimited potential as a source of human emancipation. As a contributor to the rise of

social criticism in Germany — which may have begun with Hegel's critical philosophy of history — Marx examines freedom within an institution (the press) to measure human progress; but perhaps more importantly, he comes to realise and acknowledge the potential roles of freedom and communication in the overthrow of the old order — after having emerged from the radical intellectual milieu of the Young Hegelians who increasingly addressed social problems.

These theoretical and practical contributions to placing press freedom in the historical context of revolutionary consciousness, political struggle, and commitment to a proletarian democracy describe the intellectual position of a young Karl Marx in his first encounter with the authority of the state. They also constitute the sophisticated response of a politically motivated, dedicated individual to the conditions of freedom in German society. Thus, his writings reflect not only his intellectual abilities and professional determination, but also his firm belief in the importance of freedom as a spiritual and political sphere. The latter is contained in and preserved by the pending transformation of capitalism into socialism and confirmed and strengthened, no doubt, by the soon-to-come victories of the working class.

Marx writes on freedom of the press with moral conviction and political determination; he demonstrates the power of his intellect and offers an early glimpse at the logic, style, and persuasive force of his later projects. Unlike in later theoretical works, however, his thoughts on freedom of the press emerge from the frontline of a concrete, existential struggle — beyond the survival of his newspaper in a climate of official mistrust and hostility — as a personal challenge to an individual in his roles of journalist and political activist. His journalism mediates between intellectual forces and material conditions — or between philosophical thought and a proletarian reality — to reveal a powerful and noteworthy polemic of an extraordinary mind.

Conclusions

At a time when the nature of journalism is undergoing dramatic changes in democratic societies under increasing pressures of commercial interests and aided by a growing lack of public engagement for the right to information, the writings of Karl Marx on freedom and censorship of the press serve to remind and encourage individuals not only to participate in the social and political process of public communication, but to reconsider the role of the media in a democratic society. His ideas strengthen the notion of a public sphere; they are reminders of the organising potential of editorial leadership in the struggle for freedom, and they provide encouragement, particularly to journalists and intellectual workers, who seek alternative solutions to current conceptions of press freedom.

In the past, discussions related to freedom of expression have centred on the need for structural changes of media systems, forms of ownership, or issues of access. Marx, however, offers an understanding of freedom that liberates the journalist from the institutional demands of the press by separating the professional interests of intellectual/journalistic labour from the commercial interests of the press. It is an emancipatory model of newswork that contains, at least implicitly, a humanistic theory of public communication that celebrates the power of ideas and the worth of an individual's contribution to the societal discourse. Its implementation promises a shift in the landscape of modern journalism, when the recognition

of professional responsibility and the potential of an information-centred alliance with the public help redefine the practices of a socially engaged journalism.

Notes:

This article is adapted for *Javnost—The Public* from a chapter in a forthcoming book, *Social Theories of the Press. Communication and Social Thought in Germany and the United States, 1840s-1920s*, to be published by Rowman and Littlefield, Boulder, Colorado.

1. Marx became editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung für Politik, Handel und Gewerbe* in October 1842 until the suspension of the newspaper in March 1843. It had been founded in January 1842 and developed under his editorship from a forum for liberal bourgeois ideas to an organ of revolutionary democrats. During his exile in France and Belgium Marx contributed to the *Vorwärts* in Paris (1844) and the *Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung* (1847) in Brussels, both German-language publications. A year later he founded the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Organ der Demokratie* which appeared daily — and in extra editions — between June 1848 and May 1849 in Köln (a place where press freedom existed, albeit in the shadow of prior censorship based on the Code Napoléon); Marx found liberal bourgeois financial backers initially, and the newspaper reached a remarkable circulation of 6,000 before its demise. It represented politically a social-revolutionary republican position that had been introduced by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* published earlier. The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* lists Marx as "Redakteur en Chef" and six editors, including Friedrich Engels (1820-95), Heinrich Bürgers (1820-78), Ernst Dronke (1822-91), Georg Weerth (1822-56), Ferdinand Wolff (1812-95), and Wilhelm Wolff (1809-64). Marx later dedicated *Das Kapital* to Wilhelm Wolff who had died in exile in England a few years before Marx completed the first volume.

After Marx's arrival in London, the newspaper was continued as a monthly review from January to October 1850 — under the title, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Politisch-ökonomische Revue* — and printed in Hamburg. Its appearance was advertised in several German-language publications as a review which "allows for an extensive and scientific examination of the economic conditions, which are the foundation of the political movement as such" (*Berner Zeitung* 1961, 30). Its persecution in Germany, financial difficulties, a lack of collaborators, and lacking appreciation of Marx's scientific explanations of the social and political conditions among petite bourgeois revolutionaries contributed to the decision to concentrate on the writing of books, instead (Engels 1961, 34). But Marx also became involved with *Das Volk*, a workers' weekly in London (1859), and was a regular contributor and European political editor of the *New-York Daily Tribune* from 1851to 1862.

In addition, both Marx and Engels contributed articles between 1843 to 1853 without compensation to a number of publications, including "Owen's *New Moral World*, O'Connor's *Northern Star*, Harney's *Democratic Review*, *Republican*, and *Friend of the People*, Jones's *Notes to the People* and *People's Popen*, the *Reforme* in Paris (before the revolution) and a number of journals in Belgium and Paris" (Sorge 1961, 20). According to records of close associates — who dispute the claims that Marx enriched himself while being editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* — Marx spent about 7,000 thalers on "revolutionary agitation" and the publication of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848-49 in Köln, "partly in cash from his and his wife's assets, and partly based on 'legal documents' regarding his inheritance." When the newspaper was closed, its inventory consisted of "1. one steam press, 2. a newly furnished composing room, 3. one thousand thalers of subscription fees deposited at the post office. Marx left everything behind, to cover the debts of the newspaper. . ." In fact with 300 thalers, which he had borrowed, Marx paid composers and printers and aided the flight of the editors (Sorge 1961, 20-21). The last issue of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* had been printed entirely in red and contained an editorial notice, thanking the workers of Köln for their participation and ending with the familiar slogan, "emancipation of the working class." It was reprinted several times and was traded as a collector's item for one thaler (Koszyk 1966, 117).

Unlike his journalism, which was immediate and contains links to his theoretical writings, the dissemination of his scholarly work throughout the English-speaking world proceeded haltingly and extended into the twentieth century. For instance, the first substantive work (translation and year in brackets) on Marxism (with Engels) *Die deutsche Ideologie* (*The German Ideology*) completed in 1845 to 1846 and published posthumously in 1932, signals Marx's break with the

Young Hegelians and his move toward a materialistic conception of history. The work was followed in 1847 by *Misère de la philosophie* (*Poverty of Philosophy*, 1900) — a critical response to Pierre Joseph Proudhon's *The Philosophy of Poverty*, 1846 — and (with Engels) the *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*, 1848 (*The Communist Manifesto*). Next came *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich, 1848-1850* in 1850 (*The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*, 1924), *Der 18te Brumaire des Louis Napoleon*, 1852 (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1898), and *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 1859 (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1904). The first volume of *Das Kapital* — the result of his extensive research in England — first appeared in 1867 in Germany (*Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, volume I, 1886), while volumes 2 and 3 were published posthumously by Engels (in 1885 and 1894 respectively (1907 and 1909). For details about the journalism of Karl Marx also see Bittel (1953), Hutt (1966), and McLellan (1970).

2. The following translations are by the author; they are based on the original German text provided in Iring Fetscher's (1969) compilation of articles from the *Rheinische Zeitung* (1. 1. 1842 to 31. 3. 1843) and *Neue Rheinische Zeitun*g (1, 6.1848 to 19. 5. 1849), Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels (1967/68), and other documents related to the writings of Marx and Engels on issues of press freedom. The citations also indicate the original source, e.g., *RZ* or *NRZ* (*Rheinische Zeitung* or *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*), number and date, and its location in Fetscher's book.

3. Marx recognises the importance of communication in the socialising of society, because this process — aided by increasingly sophisticated means of public communication — reveals the polarisation of society into antagonistic classes. Language as the medium of consciousness gives rise to the formation of ideologies, thus revealing and reinforcing a specific way of life (see Lefebvre 1968). The press provides the means of dissemination and persuasion and becomes indispensable in the process of socialisation while exposing the real (class) differences in society (see also de la Haye 1979).

4. Franz Mehring (1846-1919) observes that although the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* appears as an "organ of democracy" throughout its existence, "in the direct sense it championed the interests of the bourgeois revolution against absolutism and feudalism more than the interests of the proletariat against those of the bourgeoisie." And he concludes that Marx and Engels undoubtedly "were historically and politically right in thinking that the primary interest of the working class was to drive the bourgeois revolution as far forward as possible. . ." (cited in Lenin 1972, 129). Marx's liberal rhetoric seems to confirm his observations. Also George Lichtheim (1969, 208) reports that Communist League followers resented Marx's "united front" tactics and the idea that the German revolution was a bourgeois one with no involvement of the working class, and he concludes that "Marx's editorship of the paper reflected a long-range strategy quite unrelated to the immediate aim of the nascent workers' movement." When Marx was accused directly in October 1842 by another newspaper — the *Augsburger Zeitung* — of courting communism, he responded with ambivalence, suggesting that the "true danger does not lie in the practical attempt to carry out communist ideas, but in their theoretical development . . . ." Because "ideas to which reason has riveted our conscience, are chains from which one cannot break loose without breaking one's heart; they are demons that one can only overcome by submitting to them" (in McLellan 1971, 11).

5. Marx expresses the need for philosophers " to descend from the world of thought to the actual world" and argues in the *German Ideology* that "*Language* is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they had to make language into an independent realm. . . . The problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into a problem of descending from language to life" (Marx and Engels 1989b, 118). Elsewhere, Marx concludes that "just as philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *intellectual* weapons in philosophy" (in Schaff 1970, 170).

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