



Defense of Freedom, Albert Camus

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BREAD AND FREEDOM

(Speech given at the Labor Exchange of Saint-Etienne on 10 May 1953)

IF WE add up the examples of breach of faith and extortion that have just been pointed out to us, we can foresee a time when, in a Europe of concentration camps, the only people at liberty will be prison guards who will then have to lock up one another. When only one remains, he will be called the “supreme guard,” and that will be the ideal society in which problems of opposition, the headache of all twentieth-century governments, will be settled once and for all.

Of course, this is but a prophecy and, although governments and police forces throughout the world are striving, with great good will, to achieve such a happy situation, we have not yet gone that far. Among us, for instance, in Western Europe, freedom is officially approved. But such freedom makes me think of the poor female cousin in certain middle-class families. She has become a widow; she has lost her natural protector. So she has been taken in, given a room on the top floor, and is welcome in the kitchen.

She is occasionally paraded publicly on Sunday, to prove that one is virtuous and not a dirty dog. But for everything else, and especially on state occasions, she is requested to keep her mouth shut. And even if some policeman idly takes liberties with her in dark corners, one doesn't make a fuss about it, for she has seen such things before, especially with the master of the house, and, after all, it's not worth getting in bad with the legal authorities.

In the East, it must be admitted, they are more forthright. They have settled the business of the female cousin once and for all by locking her up in a closet with two solid bolts on the door. It seems that she will be taken out fifty years from now, more or less, when the ideal society is definitively established. Then there will be celebrations in her honor.

But, in my opinion, she may then be somewhat moth-eaten, and I am very much afraid that it may be impossible to make use of her.

When we stop to think that these two conceptions of freedom, the one in the closet and the other in the kitchen, have decided to force themselves on each other and are obliged in all that hullabaloo to reduce still further the female cousin's activity, it will be readily seen that our history is rather one of slavery than of freedom and that the world we live in is the one that has just been described, which leaps out at us from the newspaper every morning to make of our days and our weeks a single day of revolt and disgust.

The simplest, and hence most tempting, thing is to blame governments or some obscure powers for such naughty behavior. Besides, it is indeed true that they are guilty and that their guilt is so solidly established that we have lost sight of its beginnings. But they are not the only ones responsible. After all, if freedom had always had to rely on governments to encourage her growth, she would probably be still in her infancy or else definitively buried with the inscription "another angel in heaven."

The society of money and exploitation has never been charged, so far as I know, with assuring the triumph of freedom and justice. Police states have never been suspected of opening schools of law in the cellars where they interrogate their subjects. So, when they oppress and exploit, they are merely doing their job, and whoever blindly entrusts them with the care of freedom has no right to be surprised when she is immediately dishonored. If freedom is humiliated or in chains today, it is not because her enemies had recourse to treachery. It is simply because she has lost her natural protector. Yes, freedom is widowed, but it must be added because it is true: she is widowed of all of us.

Freedom is the concern of the oppressed, and her natural protectors have always come from among the oppressed. In feudal Europe the communes maintained the ferments of freedom; those who assured her fleeting triumph in 1789 were the inhabitants of towns and cities;

and since the nineteenth century the workers' movements have assumed responsibility for the double honor of freedom and justice, without ever dreaming of saying that they were irreconcilable. Laborers, both manual and intellectual, are the ones who gave a body to freedom and helped her progress in the world until she has become the very basis of our thought, the air we cannot do without, that we breathe without even noticing it until the time comes when, deprived of it, we feel that we are dying.

And if freedom is regressing today throughout such a large part of the world, this is probably because the devices for enslavement have never been so cynically chosen or so effective, but also because her real defenders, through fatigue, through despair, or through a false idea of strategy and efficiency, have turned away from her. Yes, the great event of the twentieth century was the forsaking of the values of freedom by the revolutionary movement, the progressive retreat of socialism based on freedom before the attacks of a Caesarian and military socialism. Since that moment a certain hope has disappeared from the world and a solitude has begun for each and every free man.

When, after Marx, the rumor began to spread and gain strength that freedom was a bourgeois hoax, a single word was misplaced in that definition, and we are still paying for that mistake through the convulsions of our time. For it should have been said merely that bourgeois freedom was a hoax—and not all freedom. It should have been said simply that bourgeois freedom was not freedom or, in the best of cases, was not yet freedom. But that there were liberties to be won and never to be relinquished again. It is quite true that there is no possible freedom for the man tied to his lathe all day long who, when evening comes, crowds into a single room with his family. But this fact condemns a class, a society and the slavery it assumes, not freedom itself, without which the poorest among us cannot get along.

For even if society were suddenly transformed and became decent and comfortable for all, it would still be a barbarous state unless freedom triumphed. And because bourgeois society talks about freedom without practicing it, must the world of workers also give up practicing it and

boast merely of not talking about it? Yet the confusion took place and in the revolutionary movement freedom was gradually condemned because bourgeois society used it as a hoax. From a justifiable and healthy distrust of the way that bourgeois society prostituted freedom, people came to distrust freedom itself. At best, it was postponed to the end of time, with the request that meanwhile it be not talked about. The contention was that we needed justice first and that we would come to freedom later on, as if slaves could ever hope to achieve justice.

And forceful intellectuals announced to the worker that bread alone interested him rather than freedom, as if the worker didn't know that his bread depends in part on his freedom. And, to be sure, in the face of the prolonged injustice of bourgeois society, the temptation to go to such extremes was great. After all, there is probably not one of us here who, either in deed or in thought, did not succumb. But history has progressed, and what we have seen must now make us think things over. The revolution brought about by workers succeeded in 1917 and marked the dawn of real freedom and the greatest hope the world has known.

But that revolution, surrounded from the outside, threatened within and without, provided itself with a police force. Inheriting a definition and a doctrine that pictured freedom as suspect, the revolution little by little became stronger, and the world's greatest hope hardened into the world's most efficient dictatorship. The false freedom of bourgeois society has not suffered meanwhile.

What was killed in the Moscow trials and elsewhere, and in the revolutionary camps, what is assassinated when in Hungary a railway worker is shot for some professional mistake, is not bourgeois freedom but rather the freedom of 1917. Bourgeois freedom can meanwhile have recourse to all possible hoaxes. The trials and perversions of revolutionary society furnish it at one and the same time with a good conscience and with arguments against its enemies.

In conclusion, the characteristic of the world we live in is just that cynical dialectic which sets up injustice against enslavement while strengthening one by the other. When we admit to the palace of culture Franco, the friend of Goebbels and of Himmler—Franco, the real victor of the Second World War—to those who protest that the rights of man inscribed in the charter of UNESCO are turned to ridicule every day in Franco's prisons we reply without smiling that Poland figures in UNESCO too and that, as far as public freedom is concerned, one is no better than the other.

An idiotic argument, of course! If you were so unfortunate as to marry off your elder daughter to a sergeant in a battalion of ex-convicts, this is no reason why you should marry off her younger sister to the most elegant detective on the society squad; one black sheep in the family is enough. And yet the idiotic argument works, as is proved to us every day. When anyone brings up the slave in the colonies and calls for justice, he is reminded of prisoners in Russian concentration camps, and vice versa. And if you protest against the assassination in Prague of an opposition historian like Kalandra, two or three American Negroes are thrown in your face.

In such a disgusting attempt at outbidding, one thing only does not change—the victim, who is always the same. A single value is constantly outraged or prostituted—freedom—and then we notice that everywhere, together with freedom, justice is also profaned.

How then can this infernal circle be broken? Obviously, it can be done only by reviving at once, in ourselves and in others, the value of freedom—and by never again agreeing to its being sacrificed, even temporarily, or separated from our demand for justice. The current motto for all of us can only be this: without giving up anything on the plane of justice, yield nothing on the plane of freedom. In particular, the few democratic liberties we still enjoy are not unimportant illusions that we can allow to be taken from us without a protest.

They represent exactly what remains to us of the great revolutionary conquests of the last two centuries. Hence they are not, as so many

clever demagogues tell us, the negation of true freedom. There is no ideal freedom that will someday be given us all at once, as a pension comes at the end of one's life. There are liberties to be won painfully, one by one, and those we still have are stages—most certainly inadequate, but stages nevertheless—on the way to total liberation. If we agree to suppress them, we do not progress nonetheless. On the contrary, we retreat, we go backward, and someday we shall have to retrace our steps along that road, but that new effort will once more be made in the sweat and blood of men.

No, choosing freedom today does not mean ceasing to be a profiteer of the Soviet regime and becoming a profiteer of the bourgeois regime. For that would amount, instead, to choosing slavery twice and, as a final condemnation, choosing it twice for others. Choosing freedom is not, as we are told, choosing against justice. On the other hand, freedom is chosen today in relation to those who are everywhere suffering and fighting, and this is the only freedom that counts.

It is chosen at the same time as justice, and, to tell the truth, henceforth we cannot choose one without the other. If someone takes away your bread, he suppresses your freedom at the same time. But if someone takes away your freedom, you may be sure that your bread is threatened, for it depends no longer on you and your struggle but on the whim of a master. Poverty increases insofar as freedom retreats throughout the world, and vice versa. And if this cruel century has taught us anything at all, it has taught that the economic revolution must be free just as liberation must include the economic. The oppressed want to be liberated not only from their hunger but also from their masters. They are well aware that they will be effectively freed of hunger only when they hold their masters, all their masters, at bay.

I shall add in conclusion that separating freedom from justice is tantamount to separating culture and labor, which is the epitome of the social sin. The confusion of the workers' movement in Europe springs in part from the fact that it has lost its real home, where it took comfort after all defeats, which was its faith in freedom. But, likewise,

the confusion of European intellectuals springs from the fact that the double hoax, bourgeois and pseudo-revolutionary, separated them from their sole source of authenticity, the work and suffering of all, cutting them off from their sole natural allies, the workers. Insofar as I am concerned, I have recognized only two aristocracies, that of labor and that of the intelligence, and I know now that it is mad and criminal to try to make one dominate the other.

I know that the two of them constitute but a single nobility, that their truth and, above all, their effectiveness lie in union; I know that if they are separated, they will allow themselves to be overcome gradually by the forces of tyranny and barbarousness, but that united, on the other hand, they will govern the world. This is why any undertaking that aims to loosen their ties and separate them is directed against man and his loftiest hopes. The first concern of any dictatorship is, consequently, to subjugate both labor and culture. In fact, both must be gagged or else, as tyrants are well aware, sooner or later one will speak up for the other. Thus, in my opinion, there are two ways for an intellectual to betray at present, and in both cases he betrays because he accepts a single thing—that separation between labor and culture.

The first way is characteristic of bourgeois intellectuals who are willing that their privileges should be paid for by the enslavement of the workers. They often say that they are defending freedom, but they are defending first of all the privileges freedom gives to them, and to them alone.¹ The second way is characteristic of intellectuals who think they are leftist and who, through distrust of freedom, are willing that culture, and the freedom it presupposes, should be directed, under the vain pretext of serving a future justice. In both cases the profiteers of injustice and the renegades of freedom ratify and sanction the of intellectual and manual labor which condemns both labor and culture to impotence. They depreciate at one and the same time both freedom and justice.

It is true that freedom, when it is made up principally of privileges, insults labor and separates it from culture. But freedom is not made up principally of privileges; it is made up especially of duties. And the

moment each of us tries to give freedom's duties precedence over its privileges, freedom joins together labor and culture and sets in motion the only force that can effectively serve justice. The rule of our action, the secret of our resistance can be easily stated: everything that humiliates labor also humiliates the intelligence, and vice versa. And the revolutionary struggle, the centuries-old straining toward liberation can be defined first of all as a double and constant rejection of humiliation.

To tell the truth, we have not yet cast off that humiliation. But the wheel turns, history changes, and a time is coming, I am sure, when we shall cease to be alone. For me, our gathering here today is in itself a sign. The fact that members of unions gather together and crowd around our freedoms to defend them is indeed reason enough for all to come here from all directions to illustrate their union and their hope. The way ahead of us is long.

Yet if war does not come and mingle everything in its hideous confusion, we shall have time at last to give a form to the justice and freedom we need. But to achieve that we must henceforth categorically refuse, without anger but irrevocably, the lies with which we have been stuffed. No, freedom is not founded on concentration camps, or on the subjugated peoples of the colonies, or on the workers' poverty! No, the doves of peace do not perch on gallows! No, the forces of freedom cannot mingle the sons of the victims with the executioners of Madrid and elsewhere! Of that, at least, we shall henceforth be sure, as we shall be sure that freedom is not a gift received from a State or a leader but a possession to be won every day by the effort of each and the union of all.

1 And, besides, most of the time they do not even defend freedom the moment there is any risk in doing so.

HOMAGE TO AN EXILE

(Speech delivered 7 December 1955 at a banquet in honor of President Eduardo Santos, editor of El Tiempo, driven out of Colombia by the dictatorship)

PROUDLY we receive among us this evening an ambassador who is not like other ambassadors. Indeed, I have read that the government that had the sorry privilege of suppressing the greatest newspaper in South America had previously offered its editor, President Eduardo Santos, an ambassadorship to Paris. You refused that honor, Mr. President, not out of scorn for Paris, we are well aware, but out of love for Colombia, and probably because you know that governments often look upon foreign embassies as places of gilded expatriation for citizens who are in the way. You remained in Bogotá, as your conscience dictated; hence you were in the way, and you were censored without diplomatic respect and in the most cynical fashion possible. But at the same time you were provided with all the titles that justify your being considered today by all of us as the true ambassador of Colombia, not only in Paris but in every capital where the single word “liberty” makes hearts beat faster.

It is not so easy as people think to be a free man. In truth, the only ones who assert that it is easy are those who have decided to forego freedom. For freedom is refused not because of its privileges, as some would have us believe, but because of its exhausting tasks. For those, on the other hand, whose function and passion consist in granting liberty all its rights and duties, know that this requires a daily effort and a constant vigilance in which pride and humility play equal parts. If we are tempted today, Mr. President, to express all our affection for you—at the same time as to Mr. Roberto García Peñas—this is because you maintained that constant vigilance without ever sparing yourself.

By refusing the dishonor that was offered you (which amounted to taking upon yourself the repudiation and penance a government dared to impose on you), by letting your fine newspaper be destroyed rather than allowing it to serve falsehood and despotism, you were one of those uncompromising witnesses who, in all circumstances, deserve

respect. But that would not yet suffice to make of you a witness of liberty.

Many men have sacrificed everything to errors, and I have always thought that heroism and sacrifice were not enough to justify a cause. Obstinacy alone is not a virtue. What, on the other hand, gives your resistance its true meaning, what makes of you the exemplary companion we are eager to greet, is that under the same circumstances—when you were the respected President of Colombia—you not only did not use your power to censor your adversaries but you kept the newspaper of your political enemies from being suppressed.

That deed alone is enough for us to recognize in you a real free man. Liberty has sons who are not all legitimate or to be admired. Those who applaud it only when it justifies their privileges and shout nothing but censorship when it threatens them are not on our side. But those who, according to Benjamin Constant's remark, are willing neither to suffer nor to possess the means of oppression, who want freedom both for themselves and for others—they, in an age that poverty or terror condemns to the excesses of oppression, are the seeds beneath the snow of which one of the greatest among us spoke. Once the storm is over, the world will live off them.

Such men, we know, are rare. Today freedom has not many allies. I have been known to say that the real passion of the twentieth century was slavery. That was a bitter remark which did an injustice to all those men (you are one of them) whose sacrifice and example every day help us to live. But I merely wanted to express that anguish I feel every day when faced with the decrease of liberal energies, the prostituting of words, the slandered victims, the smug justification of oppression, the insane admiration of force.

We see a multiplication of those minds of whom it has been said that they seemed to count an inclination toward slavery as an ingredient of virtue. We see the intelligence seeking justifications for its fear, and finding them readily, for every cowardice has its own philosophy. Indignation is measured, silences take counsel from one another, and

history has ceased to be anything but Noah's cloak that is spread over the victims' obscenity.

In short, all flee real responsibility, the effort of being consistent or of having an opinion of one's own, in order to take refuge in the parties or groups that will think for them, express their anger for them, and make their plans for them. Contemporary intelligence seems to measure the truth of doctrines and causes solely by the number of armored divisions that each can put into the field. Thenceforth everything is good that justifies the slaughter of freedom, whether it be the nation, the people, or the grandeur of the State. The welfare of the people in particular has always been the alibi of tyrants, and it provides the further advantage of giving the servants of tyranny a good conscience.

It would be easy, however, to destroy that good conscience by shouting to them: if you want the happiness of the people, let them speak out and tell what kind of happiness they want and what kind they don't want! But, in truth, the very ones who make use of such alibis know they are lies; they leave to their intellectuals on duty the chore of believing in them and of proving that religion, patriotism, and justice need for their survival the sacrifice of freedom. As if freedom, when it leaves a certain place, were not the last to go, after all that constituted our reasons for living. No, freedom does not die alone. At the same time justice is forever exiled, the nation begins to agonize, and innocence is crucified anew every day.

To be sure, freedom is not the answer to everything, and it has frontiers. The freedom of each finds its limits in that of others; no one has a right to absolute freedom. The limit where freedom begins and ends, where its rights and duties come together, is called law, and the State itself must bow to the law.

If it evades the law, if it deprives the citizens of the benefits of the law, there is breach of faith. Last August there was breach of faith in Colombia, just as there has been breach of faith in Spain for the last twenty years. And there again your example helps to remind us that

there is no compromise with breach of faith. One has to reject it and fight it.

Your battlefield was the press. Freedom of the press is perhaps the freedom that has suffered the most from the gradual degradation of the idea of liberty. The press has its pimps as it has its policemen. The pimp debases it, the policeman subjugates it, and each uses the other as a way of justifying his own abuses. Those gentlemen vie with each other in protecting the orphan and giving her shelter, whether that shelter is a prison or a house of prostitution. The orphan, indeed, is justified in declining such eager offers of help and in deciding that she must fight alone and alone resolve her fate.

Not that the press in itself is an absolute good. Victor Hugo said in a speech that it was intelligence, progress, and I know not what else. The already-old journalist I am knows that it is nothing of the sort and that reality is less consoling. But in another sense the press is better than intelligence or progress; it is the possibility of all that and of other things as well. A free press can of course be good or bad, but, most certainly, without freedom it will never be anything but bad.

When one knows of what man is capable, for better and for worse, one also knows that it is not the human being himself who must be protected but the possibilities he has within him—in other words, his freedom. I confess, insofar as I am concerned, that I cannot love all humanity except with a vast and somewhat abstract love. But I love a few men, living or dead, with such force and admiration that I am always eager to preserve in others what will someday perhaps make them resemble those I love. Freedom is nothing else but a chance to be better, whereas enslavement is a certainty of the worst.

If then, despite so many compromises or servilities, we are to continue seeing journalism, when it is free, as one of the greatest professions of the time, this is only because it allows men like you and your collaborators to serve their country and their time on the highest level. With freedom of the press, nations are not sure of going toward justice and peace. But without it, they are sure of not going there. For justice is

done to peoples only when their rights are recognized, and there is no right without expression of that right. On this point we can take the word of Rosa Luxembour, who said: “Without unlimited freedom of the press, without absolute freedom of association, the dominant power of large popular masses is inconceivable.”

Consequently, we must be adamant as to the principle of that freedom. It is not merely the basis of cultural privileges, as people try hypocritically to convince us. It is also the basis for the rights of labor. Those who, the better to justify their tyrannies, set in opposition labor and culture will not make us forget that whatever subjects the intelligence enchains labor, and vice versa. When intelligence is gagged, the worker is soon subjugated, just as when the proletariat is enslaved the intellectual is soon reduced to silence or to lies.

In short, whoever does violence to truth or to its expression eventually mutilates justice, even though he thinks he is serving it. From this point of view, we shall deny to the very end that a press is true because it is revolutionary; it will be revolutionary only if it is true, and never otherwise. So long as we keep in mind these facts, your resistance, Mr. President, will preserve its real meaning, and, far from being a solitary example, it will throw light on the long struggle that you will be helping us not to abandon.

The Colombian government accused El Tiempo of being a super-State within the State, and you were right to refute that argument. But your government was right too, although in a way that it could not accept. For, by saying that, it paid homage to the power of the printed word.

Censorship and oppression prove that the word is enough to make the tyrant tremble—but only if the word is backed up by sacrifice. For only the word fed by blood and heart can unite men, whereas the silence of tyrannies separates them. Tyrants indulge in monologues over millions of solitudes. If we reject oppression and falsehood, on the other hand, this is because we reject solitude. Every insubordinate person, when he rises up against oppression, reaffirms thereby the solidarity of all men.

No, it is not you or a distant newspaper that you defended by resisting oppression, but the entire community that unites us over and above frontiers.

Is it not true, moreover, that throughout the world your name has always been linked to the cause of freedom? How can we fail to recall here that you were and still are one of the most faithful friends of our Spain, of Republican Spain, today scattered throughout the world, betrayed by its allies and its friends, forgotten by all, humiliated Spain which stands erect solely by the force of its protest? The day when the other Spain, the Spain of churches and prisons, enters with its jailers and its censors into the organization of so-called free nations, I know that on that day you will stand with all of us, silently but with no spirit of revenge, beside free and suffering Spain.

For such fidelity let me thank you in the name of my second country and in the name of all those who, gathered here, bespeak their gratitude and their friendship. We thank you for being among those few who, in a time of enslavement and fear, stand firm on their right. People are complaining almost everywhere that the sense of duty is disappearing. How could it be otherwise since no one cares any more about his rights? Only he who is uncompromising as to his rights maintains the sense of duty.

The great citizens of a country are not those who bend the knee before authority but rather those who, against authority if need be, are adamant as to the honor and freedom of that country. And your country will always recognize in you its great citizen, as we are doing here, because you, scorning all opportunism, managed to bear up against the total injustice that was inflicted upon you.

At a moment when the most shortsighted realism, a debased conception of power, the passion for dishonor, and the ravages of fear disfigure the world, at the very moment when it is possible to think that all is lost, something on the other hand is beginning, since we have nothing more to lose. What is beginning is the period of the indomitable men devoted to the unconditional defense of liberty. This

is why your attitude serves as an example and a comfort to all those who, like me, have now broken with many of their traditional friends by rejecting any complicity, even temporary, even and above all tactical, with regimes or parties whether of the Right or of the Left that justify, however little, the suppression of a single one of our liberties!

In conclusion, allow me to say that, reading the other day the wonderful message you addressed to your people, I appreciated not only your steadfastness and constancy but also the long suffering you must have experienced. When oppression wins out, as we all know here, those who nevertheless believe that their cause is just suffer from a sort of astonishment upon discovering the apparent impotence of justice. Then come the hours of exile and solitude that we have all known. Yet I should like to tell you that, in my opinion, the worst thing that can happen in the world we live in is for one of those men of freedom and courage I have described to stagger under the weight of isolation and prolonged adversity, to doubt himself and what he represents.

And it seems to me that at such a moment those who are like him must come toward him (forgetting his titles and all devices of the official orator) to tell him straight from the heart that he is not alone and that his action is not futile, that there always comes a day when the palaces of oppression crumble, when exile comes to an end, when liberty catches fire. Such calm hope justifies your action. If, after all, men cannot always make history have a meaning, they can always act so that their own lives have one.

Believe me when I tell you that across thousands of miles, all the way from far-off Colombia, you and your collaborators have shown us a part of the difficult road we must travel together toward liberty. And allow me, in the name of the faithful and grateful friends receiving you here, to greet fraternally in you and your collaborators the great companions of our common liberation.

The End