

ICM MIDTERM PAPER
The Role of A Free Press Within a Developing Nation:

I will be writing a Socrates dialogue in which two characters will have two differing opinions on the importance of free press in a developing nation.

The first character (Reporter Mark Corcoran) will take the position that free press is one of the fundamental rights of any people within any nation. The second character (President Isaias) will express the viewpoint that a free press is important only once a nation has built its society on a solid foundation without the distraction of different opinions and ideas and then it can allow free press and these ideas to flourish.

To give you some background information about why I chose this subject my home nation of Eritrea is in the midst of facing this situation itself and the government basically has closed down all forms of independent media outlets and is the sole provider of news and information in Eritrea through its control of the television channels and newspapers.

I witnessed the lack of free press firsthand when I traveled to Eritrea to film my documentary there two years ago and its implications on society and as a whole and the people I meet. This matter concerns me deeply because the government is slowly beginning to resemble a totalistic government, which is not what the 200,000 Eritreans who sacrificed their lives over the 30-year armed independence struggle had in mind as well as the countless Eritreans who had supported the independence movement since the start.

The lack of free press and unmoderated internet access is one of the many steps that a totalistic government can take into controlling its people and it has a severe consequences on the building of a nation. It causes the people to mistrust its government and eventually leads to another struggle to topple what they begin to view as a totalistic government.

This causes me great concern because after losing so many family members in the independence struggle, I just don't want my nation and its people to suffer any more. I also plan to return to Eritrea after graduation to teach at Asmara University and these issues slowly creep into mind and slowly seem to make me reconsider my plans.

I hope this Socratic dialogue will allow you to understand how fortunate we are to live in a nation that offers so much freedom, even with its issues such as growing economic disparity between the have and have nots, the growing influence of corporations on all aspects of our government policy, we still have hope...hope for a better tomorrow...and that is something that other people are slowly losing not only in Eritrea but in countless other countries all over the world.

Yonatan Kelib
11/01/2005

Reporter Mark Corcoran: President Isaias let use continue where we left off....why isn't there any free press or free access to information (uncensored internet access) in Eritrea?.

President Isaias: Well first let us understand what is the concept of Free Press and where can it be found..as I was saying before can you please tell me where it can be found?..Can it be found in Britain and in the United States?

Reporter Mark Corcoran: Well okay first let me address the concept of Free Press..Its's basically the guarantee set forth by a government of free speech for its citizens and their associations, extended to members of news gathering organizations, and their published reporting. It also extends to newsgathering organizations. I should also point out that Universal Declaration of Human Rights indicates "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers"

President Isaias: Your explanation as eloquent as it may sounds does not take into consideration of the issues that may arise in a developing nations that would hamper the implementation of this concept and further more does this concept of a free press truly exist or are you merely feed a illusion which you so highly hold as a example of this concept.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: Well first lets us address what issues do you believe might hampers the implementation of the concept of a free press..

President Isaias: There are several issues that would need to be resolved first before this novel concept can be fully nurtured in any developing nation. First you must understand that our nation has been in a independence struggle for over 30 years and we have paid a heavy toll in human life in order to see this day. We will not allow either internal or external distractions keep us from our goals. ..and will not allow the so called Free Press to used as a instrument to deter us from our goals..

Reporter Mark Corcoran: So are you saying that a free press will be detrimental to building Eritrea as a nation.

President Isaias: Let me clarify my point, as a young nation in its formative years we can not afford distractions at this point ...

Reporter Mark Corcoran: So what are the distractions that a free press can pose to Eritrea?.

President Isaias: The overall issue with this so called concept of Free Press which you have yet to give me an example of is basically the confusion it can cause if it is not reviewed by the government during its formative period of nationbuilding.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: With all due respect, can you please give me some examples?

President Isaias: The examples which you are asking for are something that we have seen firsthand in our struggle for independence. We saw firsthand how the Ethiopian attempted to use their propaganda press outlets to try to turn the people against each other and each other and we have learned from this.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: But that was in independence struggle...surely you would agree that times have changed....

President Isaias: Well let me just say that even if we have won our independence, there are external forces at work that are trying to hamper the development of our nation. These nations will try to use any tools at their disposal to distract our people from the single goal which we should be talking about and that is building our nation...that is our first and foremost concern.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: Are you saying that the free press was infiltrated during the most recent war with Ethiopia ..

President Isaias: Several press outlets at the time of the most recent struggle pushed forth a defeatist agenda which if we allowed them to continue on this path they would have caused confusion and distrust within our society so we had to shut them down and replace them with reliable news sources that the people can trust.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: So basically government controlled press outlets are the only venue of information that the Eritrean people can trust at this time.

President Isaias: This idea of government controlled press outlets is incorrect, we the government are the voice of the Eritrean people and it is our obligation to make sure that they are given the most correct information...not defeatist information that is manufactured by external forces in order to sow mistrust and confusion amongst our people.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: So when will a free press be allowed in Eritrea?.

President Isaias: I beg to question you on that novel concept, you still haven't given me an example of a Free Press...is there a free press in the United States?.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: Well a free press exists in the United States..

President Isaias: Let me just state that your concept of Free Press is basically one in which a handful of private corporations control almost all of the information that the you receive ..is this not true?.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: Its not ownership that is the concern it's the notion that there is a freedom that these organizations have to report without any government influence or ..

President Isaias: So you are saying that the U.S government never influenced any media organizations into supporting its war against Iraq?

Reporter Mark Corcoran: Well that is a subject matter that does not have any relevancy to the issue at hand.

President Isaias: I disagree...it has now been proven that the U.S government spoon-fed inaccurate information to various news outlets in order to stir up a popular support for its war against Iraq...is this an example of a free press then?

Reporter Mark Corcoran: I do not see the point of that issue....what I am here to discuss is the issue of Free Press in Eritrea and what it means for the nations as a whole.

President Isaias: Your novel concept of a Free Press does not exist in the United States and you are merely given an impression that ones exist and if it did is it not basically being moderated by your government ..can you please answer that question.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: We are here to discuss the current issue of Free Press and access to information in Eritrea and not in the US....let me ask you how do you feel about Eritrea being listed as one of the countries with the least degree amount of Press Freedom by Reporters Without Borders? Eritrea is amongst a list of nations that include Cuba, Burma, China, Nepal...how does this make you feel?

President Isaias: My question is who funds this organization and what purpose does it serve...I do not pay any attention to any origination labeling us in anyway. It is not true so it does not effect me in any way. It was only a few years we were labeled and viewed by the outside world as a terrorist organization when in actuality we were fighting for our right for self determination...so the outside world viewpoints of us does not matter.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: Well what about the viewpoints held by some Eritreans that you are slowly becoming a dictator...

President Isaias: These people are the defeatist that we are now in a struggle against...these people are the reason why the struggle must continue on. We will not allow the sacrifice of so many of our people and fighters and our accomplishments be deterred by a few defeatists...this will not happen and it will not happen.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: So will free elections and a free press be implemented soon?

President Isaias: There you go again with your novel concept of a free press..we have a press that tells our people the truth and we allow unmoderated internet

connection..which you can see firsthand at all the Internet Cafés..would a repressive government allow this?

Reporter Mark Corcoran: What about free elections?

President Isaias: Elections for some district assemblies have already been held..

Reporter Mark Corcoran: I mean national elections and when will the constitution be ratified?

President Isaias: National Elections will implemented when the time is rights and that is something that we will strives first but we have a lot of work to do before we get that stage..same for the constitution...it will take time for the foundation of this nation to be formed and once this is accomplished we can take steps into building a secure nation.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: But when will that be..

President Isaias: We will know that time when it comes..right now we need to be a strong government so that we can protect our country against further Ethiopian aggression..we can not allow these issues to distract us from the fact that we face external forces that are hoping that we become distracted...we must be strong and forge ahead no matter what other countries think.

Reporter Mark Corcoran: Thank you for your time.

President Isaias: Its my pleasure.

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