Manifesto

Dear Sirs: The following statement of the Committee for Cultural Freedom is of such intrinsic importance that we should like to see it published in _The Nation._

New York, May 22

Sidney Hook

The tide of totalitarianism is rising throughout the world. It is washing away cultural and creative freedom along with all other expressions of independent human reason. Never before in modern times has the integrity of the writer, the artist, the scientist, and the scholar been threatened so seriously. The existence of this danger and the urgent need for common defensive action inspire the undersigned in issuing this statement.

Under varying labels and colors but with an unvarying hatred for the free mind, the totalitarian idea is already enthroned in Germany, Italy, Russia, Japan, and Spain. There intellectual and creative independence is suppressed and punished as a form of treason. Art, science, and education have been forcibly turned into lackeys for a supreme state, a denied leader, and an official pseudo-philosophy.

The Nazis have proclaimed: “There can no longer be a single artist who creates otherwise than nationally and with a national purpose. Every artist who withdraws from this preoccupation must be hunted as an enemy of the nation until he gives up his intolerable resistance.”

The words and acts of all other totalitarian regimes conform to this view. They apply it to the educator, the scientist, and the historian no less than to the artist. The results have been artistic sterility, an enslaved intellectual life, a tragic caricature of culture. Literally thousands of German, Italian, Russian, and other victims of cultural dictatorship have been silenced, imprisoned, tortured, or hounded into exile.

Triumphant in a large sector of the civilized world, the totalitarian idea is winning too dangerous an influence in many other countries. It threatens to overwhelm nations where the democratic way of life, with its cultural liberty, is still dominant. Even in the United States its beginnings are all too evident in the emergence of local political dictators, the violation of civil rights, the alarming spread of phobias, of hatred directed against religious groups, and political minorities. Omious shadows of war are gathering in our own land. Behind them lurk dangers not only to a free labor movement but to a free culture.

Through subsidized propaganda, through energetic agents, through political pressure, the totalitarian states succeed in infecting other countries with their false doctrines, in intimidating independent artists and scholars, and in spreading panic among the intellectuals. Already many of those who would be crippled or destroyed by totalitarianism are themselves yielding to panic. In fear or despair they hasten to extol one brand of intellectual servitude over another; to make fine distinctions between various methods of humiliating the human spirit and outlawing intellectual integrity. Many of them have already declared a moratorium on reason and creative freedom. Instead of resisting and denouncing all attempts to strait-jacket the human mind, they, glorify, under deceptive slogans and names, the color or the cut of one strait-jacket rather than another.

There are immediate and pervasive realities. Unless totalitarianism is combated wherever and in whatever form it manifests itself, it will spread in America. We, as writers, artists, and scholars, are deeply conscious of our responsibilities to our vocations. The circumstance that free culture, persecuted and proscribed in vast areas of Europe and Asia, seeks a refuge in America raises these responsibilities to the plane of pressing moral duty.

We therefore call for the formation of a Committee for Cultural Freedom, an organization independent of control, whether open or secret, by any political group, pledged to expose repressions of intellectual freedom under whatever pretense, to defend individuals and groups victimized by totalitarian practices anywhere, to propagate courageously the ideal of unhampered intellectual activity. This commits us as a group to no particular social philosophy—but only to one of the fundamental criteria for evaluating all social philosophies today, namely, whether it permits the thinker and the artist to function independently of political, religious, or racial dogmas. We have come together, and call upon others to join us, on the basis of the least common denominator of a civilized culture—the defense of creative and intellectual freedom.