

Orwell's Essay: At Last

Post 9/22/72

By Bernard D. Nossiter

LONDON—In the war year of 1944, George Orwell could not find a publisher for his brilliant, anti-Soviet fable, "Animal Farm."

He was under contract to Victor Gollancz, a fellow traveler who had rejected "Homage to Catalonia" and quickly turned down the far deadlier new book.

Orwell then sent it to Jonathan Cape who consulted an unnamed official in the wartime Ministry of Information. Cape wrote that the official conversation led him to "see now that it might be regarded as something which it was highly ill-advised to publish at the present time. . . the fable does follow . . . so completely the progress of the Russian Soviets and their two dictators . . . it would be less offensive if the predominant caste in the fable were not pigs."

Orwell next turned to T. S. Eliot, a conservative director of Faber and Faber. The poet praised Orwell's "distinguished piece of writing" but wondered whether "this is the right point of view from which to criticize the

political situation at the present time." He would not take it either.

The frustrated Orwell then typed out an eight-page, single-spaced essay on "The Freedom of the Press," describing his difficulties and excoriating the treason of the intellectuals. He intended it as a preface for "Animal Farm," when and if the book appeared.

But at last, in 1945, Secker and Warburg took it. The preface, however, was held out. The book, of course, was an enormous success, translated into 16 languages even before Orwell's death soon after.

The unpublished essay was found in May of last year among the papers of Roger Senhouse, a partner of publisher Fred Warburg. This week, it has at last been printed, by The Times Literary Supplement.

In the words of Bernard Crick, who is working on a study of Orwell as a political writer, the essay is "intemperate" but also "among the most significant" that Orwell had ever written.

Orwell writes that self-

ensorship can be expected from the British daily press, "extremely centralized, and most of it owned by wealthy men who have every motive to be dishonest on certain topics."

But the awful fact is that "the same kind of veiled censorship also operates in books and periodicals . . . anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness. A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing . . .

"At this moment, what is demanded by the prevailing orthodoxy is an uncritical admiration of Soviet Russia . . . For all know, by the time this book is published my view of the Soviet regime may be the generally accepted one. But what use would that be in itself? To exchange one orthodoxy for another is not necessarily an advance. The enemy is the gramophone mind, whether or not one agrees with the record that is being played at the moment," Orwell writes.

As so often, Orwell had hit on a home truth. Today, of course, anti-Soviet books are commonplace. But writers who have attempted to discuss racism in the Jewish middle-class or questioned the sanctity of Indira Gandhi's "socialist" India have confronted problems akin to Orwell's.

"If one loves democracy, the argument runs, one must crush its enemies by no matter what means. And who are its enemies? It always appears that they are not only those who attack it openly and consciously, but those who "objectively" endanger it by spreading mis-

See ESSAY, B10, Col. 3

Orwell's Essay: At Last

ESSAY, From B1

taken doctrines. in other words, defending democracy involves destroying all independence of thought.

"If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear . . . It is the liberals who fear liberty and the intellectuals who want to do dirt on the intellect: It is to draw attention to that fact that I have written this preface."