

Samizdat Oz-style

It seems to me that another way of spelling 'phoenix' is 'samizdat'. Both terms are about redemption and resurrection from the flames of defeat. It's a Russian word, and any Australian who deludes himself he lives in a free country needs to learn what it means. I've read that Gough Whitlam as PM said despondently that Australians don't live in a free country. I was surprised by his honesty, not what he said. I recall French President Francois Mitterrand saying roughly the same thing to the French when he discovered, after three months in the Elysee Palace, that if France was being run, it certainly wasn't being done from his office. I was highly amused by the whole thing. He got to the top job without realizing how the show was run. The French have something in common with Australians: they pick lemons instead of leaders. But at least the French publishing industry is in better health than the Australian.

One of the most disturbing things about the book publishing business today is how it's adopted many of the Orwellian traits of language abuse and control of ideas that we saw in the Soviet bloc. In the West today, business-suited publishers feel obliged to please the ruling minorities at the expense of the bohemian writer and his readership. The middlemen and agents have become controllers of the literary product. This is the sort of intrusive influence we despised in the Soviet Union

at its worst under the boofhead comrade Brezhnev, but since the collapse of Bolshevism (remember that Communism is alive and well in many countries, including China, the next USA). The trend has drifted Westward to be adopted by governments, corporations and individuals alike. It's as though while we had an enemy who indulged in such vile practises, we'd refrain and claim the moral high ground. Not anymore. It's open slather, and there's not a great deal of opposition or resistance to the trend. Most would deny its existence.

We decided that Phoenix is to be a publisher with a special calling. Yes, it will do all genres within reason – sport, arts, philosophy, sociology, comedy, social critique and politics. But apart from the more usual activities as a publisher, it would be an organ of resistance, by practising a technologically updated form of *samizdat*. *Samizdat* was an important tactic in dissident activity across the Soviet bloc whereby writers and their friends reproduced censored publications by hand and passed the documents from reader to reader, thus building a foundation for the successful resistance of the 1980s. This grassroots practice to evade officially-imposed censorship was fraught with danger as harsh punishments were meted out to people caught possessing or copying censored materials.

Vladimir Bukovsky defined it as follows: "I myself create it, edit it, censor it, publish it, distribute it, and get imprisoned for it." If the trend continues, as it no doubt will, I can foresee a time in the near future where

that Soviet if not Russian problem will be endemic in the West. It's already well entrenched in the corporate world and government. Lies and deception are dressed up as 'spin' to do what the Soviets did without the spin.

Strictly speaking, *samizdat* is self-publication, carried out at a cottage industry level, which, as is shown in other pages here, is where publishing belongs if it's to be free of the controlling influences that pollute the craft hijacked by big business. A large publishing operative, Jason Epstein, insists that the corporatization of the production of books has brought it and human culture to the edge of catastrophe. Only for the internet and digital publishing, we'd be entering a new Dark Age where the written and electronic word would be sculpted to suit the interests of the few who pull the levers of social control. George Orwell's genius is yet to be vindicated.

Nobody can control internet content the way the plutocrats commandeered the book publishing and distribution machinery. One of the international whoppers was bought by the mafia to launder drug money. Writers, literature and the public interest were the last thing on their agenda. And with the financial demands being even more severe, the only publishers left standing will be those divorced from the status quo and the conventions that brought the industry to its knees. Without *samizdat*, we wouldn't have heard of the likes of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov or any of the dissidents who brought about the fall of Soviet

Bolschevism. Without Phoenix, you'd never hear from Lorcan Lawson, Paul Perrot, Larry Kynne or G.James Hamilton. Without Phoenix, yet more outspoken voices wouldn't be added to this list and likewise would simply *not be heard*. The publishing machine is geared up not to even read their stuff because it's bound to offend the imbeciles who see their role in life to tell us what the truth is.