

general, who was becoming the focus of much speculation in the pamphlets of the various factions. In an attempt to quell the rise in anonymous unlicensed works Secretary Scott was asked to look after the press and a notice was sent to the Lord Mayor and Common Council of London reminding them of the Act passed 20 September 1649 censoring the distribution of scandalous books and papers. The Lord Mayor was to suppress all news-hawkers, mercury women, and ballad singers. Likewise the Stationers' Company was asked to make diligent searches of all presses involved in unlicensed work and to report back on their surveillance. However, the list of pamphlets and books which were printed during this period is a testament to the ineffective governance of the press. There was an accepted belief that the press was free. Prior to his concealment, Livewell Chapman had been encouraged in his activities by John Desborough: 'We fix on you as the faithfullest man, to convey our thoughts to our brethren about London. The Press is free enough for it, there is no restraint on that as yet.'¹⁰ Thus, the work of L'Estrange and Milton continued unabated.

A characteristic feature of this period of debate in the press was the speed with which the royalists would answer the publications of their opponents. Milton proved a highly provocative pamphleteer whom the royalists regarded with a mixture of scorn and begrudging respect. He had made his mark by countering Salmasius, held to be Europe's greatest scholar, in the *Defence of the People of England*. The *Readie & Easie Way* appeared and provoked a number of replies from the royalist camp. The opportunity to belittle Milton in a changing political context was an incentive for attacks such as *The Censure of the Rota upon Mr. Milton's Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, *The Dignity of Kingship Asserted*, and L'Estrange's *Be Merry and Wise, or, A Seasonable Word*. This was L'Estrange's first published answer to the arguments Milton promoted. The changing political fortunes were openly exploited to discredit his rival:

I could only wish his Excellency [Monck] had been a little civilier to Mr. Milton; for, just as he had finished his model of a commonwealth directing in these very terms, the choyce; men not addicted to a single person, or House of Lords, and the work is done. Income the secluded members and spoyle his project . . .¹¹

Because of the speed with which those pamphlets were written and their general anonymous nature, mistaken attributions were made. These attributions, whether right or wrong, were often used by the royalists to condemn major figures such as Milton, Marchamont Nedham and Livewell Chapman for works in which they had not participated. It was better to give the 'seditious' work