

## Letter to Friend No. 1 [1977]

Dear friend,

I understand very well your embarrassment caused by my refusal to accept and forward your signature as well as I understand your anger about the way used by press, radio and television – and even some politicians in order to rouse all the possible dirt and mud around the whole affair. But what would be the sense of your active participation: first of all, you would be expelled from the school to which you were accepted after three years of trials. But society needs educated, knowledgeable and experienced specialists and not the people who knew only to be brave once. Failure does not mean that you do not sign something you consider as true; I myself would not consider cautiousness even with adults as a failure. Failure begins only when you sign a lie or which is basically the same when you start belittling decision of others who have chosen the risk of immediate conflict. Anyway, there is still time enough; for weeks and months you will have the opportunity to take the risk, too. But I suggest postponement; and till then we might try to enlighten some important and more general problems.

Let us begin with a passage from your letter: "Although I do not understand quite well why such protest has been raised only now..." Everything has its own time, its own "kairos", limit or term. It is not, of course, easy to know the right time. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we do not. I think that this time we have succeeded and I would like to explain the reasons which lead me to such conclusion. Very important for all of us were the trials with the groups Plastic People of the Universe and DG 307 (and the preceding trials in Pilsen). These trials have shown something new: for the first time since 1969 there has formed in our own country a circle of resisting and protesting people willing to express their solidarity with those who were tried (in 1971–72 only groups or individuals abroad were protesting); together with the protests abroad, these people also for the first time succeeded in gaining concrete results: mitigation of sentences from Pilsen at the appellate trial, change of the text of indictment in Prague, reduction of the number of people tried at least in the first trial, lower sentences in Prague for the leading personalities in comparison with Pilsen where only the organizers were tried etc. It appeared that after a long time the political situation became somehow plastic again. On the other hand, this of course threw a new light on Helsinki and on the coming meeting in Beograd.

The publication of Helsinki Agreement raised certain hopes: those have, however, soon disappeared when it became obvious that the internal life in the country would remain untouched. The real importance of the Agreement should have apparently its use in international negotiations. And here the Agreement followed the main if not the only reason: confirmation of status quo, acknowledgement of the distinguished spheres of influence and interest. But in 1975 the two important international pacts were quite inconspicuously ratified by the Federal Assembly and the president. The pacts were brought to advantage at the end of March, but they were published in the Digest of Statutes only in the middle of October. The ratification as well as publication were given no publicity. Nevertheless, this situation determined the first task: all citizens must know about it, all of them must realize the meaning of ratification of those pacts which were signed by Czechoslovakia already in 1969. They must realize that the Pacts have now become a part of our legislative system, that they are our own laws now and our standing statutes will have to be interpreted in future in accordance with them and if some older formulations contradict the new law, they will have to be abolished or corrected. It was necessary to do something that would make the greatest possible number of people interested in both international pacts, in the General Declaration, in human rights and civil liberties in general. Something that would make them realize that ratification opened a legal way for the citizens' initiative which could practically support every act of the Federal Assembly and the president and which would help in the ordinary every day life to bring both Pacts to life. At the same time, however, every citizen, who had just learnt about the ratification and who had studied the already well-known paragraph no. 120/23, from 13 Oct. 1976 (unless he had known them already), must have asked another question: how is it possible that such statutes which are so obviously contradictory to the practice of our state, ie. police, court and other official organs, are becoming a

part of our legislative system? There are two possible answers to this question: either it means beginning of a struggle for new policy or it is only another disguising manoeuvre before the Beograd meeting. It was in fact very difficult to decide which answer should people take even though the majority seemed to prefer the latter explanation. And these additional reasons proved the necessity to do something in accordance with those two Pacts, with their inherent sense in order to show how the things really are. It was necessary to try to find out what have been so far hidden and about which there were only unfounded guesses on both sides with those who hoped in practical application of the Pacts as well as with those who could have been only afraid of it.

And of course there was the third reason. The Beograd meeting which should check up and evaluate observation and fulfilling of the Helsinki Agreement is drawing near. Besides that, having ratified the Pacts, our country is obliged to hand in reports about the provisions made and about the progress achieved by observation of the statutes recognized by both Pacts. That means that the representatives of our country will have to report in Helsinki as well as to the general secretary of the UN. The citizens of course cannot remain indifferent to the fact whether the reports will be true or whether they will not. The main task is certainly the application of the Pacts concerning the civil and political rights in our country, in our society. But we should not underestimate the meaning of the world public; on the contrary, we must do all so that the world public could support by the means of sympathy and help our struggle for the application of human rights in our country. And the real constant support is possible only if everything is presented in its true likeness, in true light. The voice of world public meaning must inevitably waver and weaken once it comes out that it was based on false information and wrong evaluation of events or state of affairs. Truth, however, is usually claimed by the weak ones; truth in hands of the violent and of those in power soon ceases to be truth and turns into half-truths and lies. And since the supporters of human rights in our country are those who are weaker, they must never dismiss any opportunity to interpret correctly reality and to propagate truth and truthful information by all means and all ways. That means using also foreign supporters of human rights and also foreign media of communication since they are denied publicity at home (in contradiction to our laws).

And this was the origin of Charta 77 which was from the very beginning supported by signatures of people of various opinions and political conviction but who nevertheless agreed upon one basic problem: that fundamental human rights must be respected even in our country and that there must be made an end to arbitrariness and wilfulness, to unlawfulness and injustice which had again taken dangerous roots in our country. That is why communists and marxists expressed their support to the fight for religious freedom and why Christians supported the discriminated and publicly insulted communists and marxists. That is why those whose children were allowed to study or already finished their studies also protested against the discrimination affecting admissions to secondary schools and universities. Why those still working in their profession protest that some people are being denied this right. For democrats, this is a matter of course: even if I do not agree with somebody, I respect and support his right to express and publish his ideas (unless he intends to undermine the same right with the others); even if I have different or contradictory opinions, I sympathize with my ideological opponent in case he is defamed and untruthfully accused, particularly if he cannot defend himself. Charta 77 therefore is not political platform for people of a similar or same political orientation but it is expression of their fundamental solidarity with the principles of inalienable rights which must not be anybody wilfully denied; and it is also expression of civil political decency of people who do not want to strive for their place in society by dealing unfair blows, but who also are not prepared to put up with unlawful actions whether these are aimed against themselves or against any other member of our society. The officially published and allegedly spontaneous, in fact quite obviously organized "voices of people" are very explicitly revealing the moral (or rather immoral) principles of so called critics of Charta 77. Hundreds of thousands of people were acquainted in a repeated TV programme with exasperation qualifying the signature of Jiří Hanzelka as impertinence. Apparently because the text he signed disclosed the fact that numerous young people are being denied the right of education because of their opinions or the

opinions of their parents and his own son was allowed to study. This is how our TV propagates the principle: if your own children are allowed to study, do not bother about the children of others who are not allowed to. This strange "morality" is on the other hand completely satisfied when a university professor, an anatomist, in the course of reprisals against Charta 77 shamelessly pointed out that he was never denied the freedom of research or travels abroad pretending he did not know about the tens of thousands of others who are still being denied this freedom. But we shall talk about this "morality" some other time. It will be very instructive to throw some light on some details of the hysterical campaign against Charta 77 and the "chartists". Today I just wanted to refer to the chief motives of those who signed Charta – as I see them, anyway. Till then, think about these problems.

Yours sincerely

Ladislav Hejdínek

Prague, 10 February, 1977