

Letter to Friend No. 4 [1977]

Dear friend,

You are asking me whether I am really such democrat I think I am if I support "renewal and revival of socialist programme", if I speak about observation of "socialist legality" and if it seems that I do not consider at all the possibility that in our society and in our state there are also people who are not Marxist-Leninist and perhaps not even socialists. And you ask what is the difference between our communists "who do not acknowledge any other socialism than their own one" and myself who admit pluralism of ideas concerning socialism but nevertheless insist on socialism as such. And your main question is: how can I justify my connecting socialism and democracy as a basis and even precondition of forming democratic society?

I think that you pointed at the very basic aspect of modern democracy and so shall devote my letter solely to this problem. At first though I must limit my subject negatively. I shall use a concrete case. In 1972 I was (similarly as many others) tried and convicted under the condition that I committed the criminal offence (which was in my case only supposed and never proved and which I have in fact never committed), for which I was tried, because of "hostility against socialism and our socialistic state". (It is not important that I was later relieved under amnesty act and today I must be considered again as irreproachable citizen of our society). It means that if two people decide to commit the same offence, one of them can be convicted and the other one need not depending whether their motive was or was not "hostility against socialism and our socialistic state". Karl Marx wrote in great detail about laws persecuting people because of their ideas and about situation in which citizen, in this case a writer, "is given over to the most terrible terrorism, to jurisdiction of suspicion". It is worth reading; but I would like to underline here only one place in his criticism: "Law that punishes for ideas is not a law of a state against citizens of that state, it is a law of one side against the other. It is a dividing law and not uniting one, and every law that is dividing is reactionary. It is not a law, it is a privilege. One can do something that the other is denied to do and not because he would lack some objective presupposition, as a child is not competent to make contracts, but because his loyalty, his way of thinking are suspicious." So here is one aspect of this matter: socialism as orientation, as a conviction. as an idea, programme. And there is only one possible democratic conclusion: every citizen even in socialist state has a right to comprehend in his own way what is socialism, whether he agrees with thus comprehended socialism or whether he is critical about it. There does not and must not exist (in really democratic state) any arbiter who would decide which conception of socialism is correct and which is incorrect; there can be only specialists whose education, knowledge and precise methodical thinking will gain them such respect that no official function or patronage of those in power could guarantee them. The difference of attitudes can be overcome only in discussion and through arguments. Reglementation used by those in power or by administration is unacceptable and if it still exists, it is immoral and lawless.

Nevertheless, if the state, state apparatus and state organs are not allowed to influence discussions and ideological clashes concerning different conceptions of socialism, it does not mean that I as a citizen or even a member of some organizations cannot criticize those conceptions of socialism which are immature, inconsistent, deformed etc. (whether I agree with socialism or whether I do not). And one of the principal illogical aspects and deformations can be seen in those conceptions that divide democratic and socialistic principles. The main stream of socialism had formed as application of democratic principles to the social and economic spheres. History has proved that democratic principles will remain only theoretical if they are limited strictly to the political sphere. Modern democracies often disappointed hopes that they incited in masses only because they were inconsistent in materializing their own principles. What is the use of declaring that all people are born free and equal as far as their dignity and rights are concerned when a child, just born, is wedged in the oppressive situation of a family with many children, living almost in a slum, with father without a job for more than six months and unwell, with mother losing her energy and with the only income being earned by two oldest children still under age? The fact that all people are endowed with reason

makes the reason itself to despair; consciousness is becoming similarly as brotherhood – extremely dubious, Formulation that everybody has all rights and liberties without any distinction, e.g. according to property, is becoming a provocative sarcasm. And the right to live is shrinking: a piece of grub is saving life at least for a while. If democratic principles are to be effective, then it is necessary inevitably and without compromises to extend them so that they would not remain only on the paper. Our example might lead to the conclusion that they should be extended mainly in the sense of material security of every citizen. But that would be misunderstanding. Man needs another man even more than bread and he needs the sense of living much more than the means of living. But in any case, he needs the bread and the means and he needs them urgently. And if he does not have them, all the liberties and rights declared are of no use for him. Socialism, in its very essence, is nothing more and nothing less than such application and extension of democratic principles in social and economic spheres.

History has however proved that the grand programme of social and economic reconstruction of society can be misused (whether intentionally and with evil intentions or unintentionally and with good intentions, which anyway comes out the same) to oppress and suspend political and cultural liberties and rights. People who are hungry usually do not bother too much about the freedom of press or expression; people who have no money to pay the rent usually do not care whether they can or cannot visit foreign countries; those who have slaved all their lives for few pennies appreciate first of all they have enough to eat and where to live. And if they can modernize their house or build a new one, if they can buy a car and dress themselves as they do "in town" and this is the present situation in the country – then in some cases they do not have much understanding for the troubles of writers, journalists, politicians, scientists etc. who cannot work as they best know and sometimes they cannot work in their profession at all. These people sometimes just cannot be bothered by the fact that certain books and magazines, considered by somebody at the top as dangerous, are being discarded from libraries. But history has also proved that such indifference does not pay off; political liberties are necessarily followed by other liberties. As soon as literary and other critics who cannot be bribed are suspended, the book market might be flooded by dubious values, exhibitions are reserved only for "licensed" artists, magazine pages only for chosen articles. (even specialized biological journals were once accepting only articles ritually condemning genetics as bourgeois science etc.). And not only this. If an employee loses his job for inadequate reason it comes out that trade union organization limits its activity only to assigning the bonuses and holding ceremonial or amusement meetings but it cannot afford to stand up for its member. At the end all are effected again, if only by the fact they must carry the consequences of non-professional management of factories, of whole industries and at the end of the whole national economy which became greatly ineffective as a result of changed criteria effecting the choice of management. Remedy is extremely difficult; and it is usually only partial and temporary, if it is only a matter of campaign and not a matter of continuous reconstruction.

Although Marx (as well as Engels) belonged to radical democrats, Marxist socialism has been suffering already since the twenties from antidemocratic deformations which no reformation or attempt for improvement has so far got rid of. But on the other hand, so called western democratic countries are not able to solve principally the problem of unemployment, although they have done a notable job in their social policy (at first mainly to oppose the danger of communism, but today the social security of citizens forms an important part of their politics). so that today we can ask: will the so called real communism prove its vitality by consistent application of political and cultural liberties (and by substantial increase of economic effectiveness)? Or will rather western democracies prove their vitality by extending democratic principles to the social and economic spheres? Whatever happens, it is certain to be of world-wide importance. Because the future of the world as well as the future of democracy shall not be decided in the United States nor in Soviet Union (and in Europe) but in the biggest countries of the third world: in Latin-American political giants such as Argentina and Brazil, in China, India, and in presently still too split Africa. At the moment the democratic political structures are slowly progressing (although the character of this progress is not yet too clearly

comprehensible); progressing is also the awareness of necessity to extend democratic principles to the social and economic spheres. But the victory of social and socialistically orientated democracy in the third world shall be the decisive problem of the nearest decade. And it can be helped only by creating a well functioning and attractive model.

Yours

Ladislav Hejránek

3 March, 1977