

D 61

16th February 1989

Statement by the Movement for Civil Liberties: *Paths to democracy in the wake of the January events*

Just a few short weeks have passed since the January events. It is clear none the less that they represent an important milestone in our most recent history. For an

entire week people from Prague and other parts took to the streets of the capital where they were beaten, assailed with water-cannon, armoured personnel carriers and police dogs and risked persecution at the hands of the police, the authorities and the courts. In so doing, the thousands and tens of thousands who took part were voicing their forthright rejection of the regime's efforts to maintain them as a silent and passive mass.

Their protests reflect society's growing determination to decide its own future. More and more people are unwilling to look on in silence while their lives, the lives of their children, and the fruit of their work are manipulated by a regime that feels responsibility to no one. The public rejects the malicious campaign waged against the demonstrators, the citizens' initiatives and all manifestations of independence. Even a considerable number of employees in the fields of culture and learning have joined with industrial workers, entire workforces and students in calling for freedom of expression and voicing support for all those unjustly imprisoned. In particular they have come out in support of the writer Václav Havel. A similar stand has been taken by the representative of the Catholic Church, the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal František Tomášek.

In spite of this manifest evidence of society's political emancipation, the official media are continuing their unscrupulous campaign of lies and calumnies against those who demonstrate civic courage and seek a way out of society's crisis. A particularly sorry chapter in this whole campaign is the exploitation of extreme reactions to the social crisis. There is no way we can determine the reliability of the reports of terrorist threats put out in recent days. We have no idea who is behind those provocations or the terrorist attack in Ústí nad Labem. What is certain, however, is that the regime is exploiting them to blacken and discredit the different independent citizens' initiatives. It is hardly necessary to emphasise yet again that terrorist methods of all kinds are entirely incompatible

with our ethical and political principles and at variance with the declared principles of all the other citizens' initiatives. On the contrary, it is the authorities which reject dialogue and instead provoke violence. It is they who employ brutality against citizens. At the same time they are deliberately dramatising the situation and fostering a climate of confrontation within society. The latest legal measures adopted do nothing to improve the state of public order or protect citizens' rightful interests. Instead they have brought the country to the brink of a state of emergency.

In the face of the current profound crisis we declare once again that we are advocates of nation-wide dialogue as the only possible means of restoring confidence and initiative within society. Without such confidence or a determination on the part of the majority of our citizens to take part in putting our affairs to rights and implementing fundamental political and economic reforms, we will become a country without a future. We will be overtaken by a disaster, the nature and extent of which can already be gauged. There can be no exclusions from a nation-wide dialogue. One cannot exclude the citizens' initiatives, which were working for a constructive dialogue long before it became an official slogan. One cannot exclude from it the churches, the social organisations, economic managers at all levels, the new government or, of course, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Ladislav Adamec's government came into office on a platform that acknowledged the state of the Czechoslovak economy to be considerably worse than had previously been officially assumed, and that this had deep-seated historical causes. This throws new light on the many critical voices who for years on end drew attention to the erroneous concepts and dubious practices within the life of society. Notwithstanding, the political leadership continues to display an unwillingness to learn from its own mistakes and just keeps up the same old inane monologue, impervious to any alternative opinion. It is an aberrant policy whose harmful-

ness is realised not only by the general public but also by many Communist Party members and officials.

The dramatic backdrop to this stagnation are the fundamental changes taking place in the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary. Our country's political leadership is taking a conspicuous stand against those trends. Out of fear for their own status they are resisting radical changes and becoming in the process the main protagonists of Stalinist concepts in Eastern Europe. The ramifications of this represent a major threat to the process of détente which the Vienna CSCE meeting pushed ahead in such a remarkable fashion.

We wish to point out most earnestly the responsibility borne at this present time by the top political leaders in this country. For many of them, the weight of their pasts, their own part in the deepening stagnation and in fostering Brezhnevite conceptions of "really existing socialism" lead them to fear for their own positions. Hence they are afraid of direct talks with our country's citizens. They have become accustomed to using repression as a means of tackling trickier situations and they are now clearly at a loss. Before they start pointing the accusing finger at the middle ranks of officialdom, they should start to consider their own responsibility.

In the circumstances, we feel bound to press the following demands:

1. We call for the resignation of those members of the political leadership who, though responsible for the present state of society, continue to limit scope for dialogue and block fundamental political and economic change.

2. We call on the Deputies of the Federal Assembly, to recognise their responsibility towards the people and refuse to ratify the legal measures adopted by its Presidium on 14th February 1989 which reinforce existing repressive legal powers against citizens.

3. We urge that citizens' rightful demands and the requirements of public order be met not by the restriction of fundamental civil rights or the adoption of emergency

legal provisions and further repressive measures against citizens, but on the contrary by action on the part of the country's political leadership, government and legislative bodies to respect civil rights, above all by guaranteeing all citizens and independent initiatives freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression. The recognition and guarantee of those civil rights and freedoms is an essential condition for the involvement of citizens in the process of political and economic change, as well as in public affairs and in the social dialogue – the all-embracing, open debate about the path to democracy.

On behalf of the provisional co-ordinating committee and supporters of the Movement for Civil Liberties

Rudolf Battěk, Václav Benda, Pavel Bratinka, Ján Čarnogurský, Tomáš Hradělek, Jozef Jablonický, Jiří Kantůrek, Jan Kozlík, Miro Kusý, Ladislav Lis, Anna Marvanová, Jaroslav Mezník, Pavel Nauman, Jaroslav Šabata, Milan Šimečka, Jan Šimsa, Jan Štern, Saša Vondra