

Nonetheless, I would like, in conclusion, to say something about one aspect of the whole case which has not been touched on so far. The indictment states that I "attempted to disguise the anti-state and anti-socialist character of the planned gathering". That statement, of which, incidentally, no concrete proof is given – nor can it be – imputes political motives to my actions. I am therefore within my rights to dwell for a while on the political aspects of the entire case.

First of all, I must point out that the words "anti-state" and "anti-socialist" have long since lost all semantic meaning, having become, in the course of their many years' entirely arbitrary use, no more than a derogatory label for all citizens who inconvenience the regime for whatever reason, and it has absolutely nothing to do with their actual political opinions. At various periods of their lives, three General Secretaries of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – Slánský, Husák and Dubček – were described in these words. Now the same label is applied to Charter 77 and other independent citizens' initiatives, simply because the government dislikes their activity and feels the need to discredit them in some way. As can be seen, the indictment in my case also indulged in the same kind of political abuse.

What is the real political purpose of our activity? Charter 77 was created and continues to function as an informal community endeavouring to monitor respect for human rights in our country, including compliance with the relevant international covenants or with the Czechoslovak constitution, as the case may be. For twelve years now, Charter 77 has been drawing the attention of the authorities to serious discrepancies between their legal commitments and what is the actual practice in our society. For twelve years it has warned about various disturbing phenomena and signs of crisis, and exposed violations of constitutional rights, as well as arbitrary behaviour, bungling and incompetence on the part of the authorities. In pursuing these activities, Charter 77 is expressing the

D 66

21st February 1989

Václav Havel's concluding statement at the Prague 1 District Court

Your honour,

Since I have already commented sufficiently on the individual arguments of the indictment, both during the pre-trial proceedings and in this court, I do not intend to repeat myself but will merely sum up my position. I believe that no evidence has been produced to prove either incitement or obstruction of a public servant in the performance of his duties. I therefore consider myself innocent and demand my release.

views of a broad section of our society, as I am able to gauge for myself every day. For twelve years we have been inviting the authorities to take part in a dialogue about these matters. For twelve years, the authorities have ignored our campaign and merely imprisoned or prosecuted us for our part in it. Notwithstanding, the regime now acknowledges many of the problems that the Charter exposed years ago and which could have long been solved, had the authorities heeded its voice. Charter 77 has always stressed the non-violent and legal character of its activities. It has never been its objective to organise street disturbances.

I myself have stressed publicly on repeated occasions that the degree of respect accorded to dissenting and critically-minded citizens is a measure of respect for public opinion in general. On repeated occasions I have stressed that continued disdain for peaceful expressions of public opinion can lead only to increasingly open and forcible social protest. I have repeatedly stated that it will be to no one's advantage if the government waits until people start demonstrating and taking strike action, and that it could all be easily avoided if the authorities were to start engaging in dialogue and displaying a readiness to listen to critical voices.

No heed has ever been paid to such warnings and the present regime is now reaping the fruits of its own disdainful attitudes.

I must confess to one thing: on 16th January it was my intention to leave Wenceslas Square as soon as the flowers had been laid by the statue. In the event, I stayed there for over an hour, chiefly because I was unable to believe my eyes. Something had happened that I would have never dreamed possible. The police's entirely futile interference with those who wished, quietly and without publicity, to lay flowers near the statue, succeeded instantly in transforming a random group of passers-by into a crowd of protesters. I realised just how profound civic discontent must be if something like that could happen.

The indictment quotes me as telling our country's leaders that the situation was serious. In point of fact I told them that the situation was more serious than they thought. Then on 16th January, I suddenly realised that the situation was more serious than even I had previously thought.

As a citizen who wants to see things take a calm and peaceful course in our country, I sincerely trust that the authorities will at last heed the lesson and initiate an earnest dialogue with all sections of society, and that no one will be excluded from that dialogue for being labelled "anti-socialist". I sincerely trust that the authorities will at last stop playing the ugly damsel who breaks the mirror in the belief that her reflection is to blame. That is also why I trust I shall not be convicted groundlessly yet again.

(Václav Havel's statement after the verdict)

Since I do not feel guilty, I have nothing to feel remorse for, and if I am to be punished, I shall regard my punishment as a sacrifice in a good cause, a sacrifice which is negligible compared to Jan Palach's absolute sacrifice, the anniversary of which we were intending to commemorate.