

Democracy Without Boundaries

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The title of today's workshop »Democratic Politics Today« relates the question of the possibility of democracy to time. I myself shall attempt to answer this question in such a way that it also relates to space. In short, what kind of possibility does the individual living within socialism have in answer to the question of the possibility of democratic politics today?

As subjects of scientific discourse, which by nature is desegregational and universal, we all have equal possibilities - as much those living in the West as those living in the East - to contribute some new knowledge to the discussion on the possibility of democratic politics: But I leave the problematics of the strictly theoretical definition of the essence of the political aside here.

What I am interested is the following question: what chances, we from the East, have to intervene in a »democratic discussion«, if we remain in the vestibule of theoretical reflection or, furthermore, if we remain with the theoretical generalisation of the practical experiences of the struggle for human rights, political plurality and a legal state in socialist countries. The justification of such a question is well illustrated in an article which the German monthly, *Kommune*, had devoted not long ago to the political happenings in Slovenia; the afore-mentioned article gave a thorough and precise description, accompanied by a disconcerting observation that: »the visitor from the West«, if I use the author's formulation, is reminded by the democratic struggle in Slovenia more of history than of the question of democratic politics today.

One most probably does not have to stress that the democratic struggles in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia etc. differ amongst themselves in regard to their specific context and form as also in regard to their historical tradition, development and expansion, etc. But the more we consider their renewed historic specificity, their irreducible differences, the more that is common to them comes to light. Namely, that they are directed towards that, which in western societies is already a fundamental social characteristic, their »common sense«: toward formal democracy and towards the abstract, noncontextual subject as its bearer. With this orientation, as it seems, towards a certain fundamental sameness of democracy, they open up the question which is spontaneously brought up by the afore-mentioned article in the *Kommune*; i.e., can they offer the »visitor from the west« anything truly new at all?

Here we must reply cautiously. It is obvious that there is enough theoretical explanations and empiric evidence for the reciprocal influence of the democratic

struggles in the East and in the West. But it is more appropriate to read the above question as its own answer. What is produced by the democratic struggles in the East as new is the question itself: in what way these struggles are new. Strictly speaking, they place the fundamental question to the forefront of what the real core of democracy is, of those processes which always come full circle, without regard for the diverse historic specificities of »democratic invention«.

I think that on the basis of the present democratic struggles in Slovenia the following claim can be made: Although these struggles are directed towards formal democracy, formal democracy is not established as a meta-historic, universal ideal. That, which in the actual struggles for political plurality and a legal state always comes full circle, is the internal impossibility, the internal barrier of formal democracy, the »democratic crises«, which is immanent to the established democracy. The democratic struggles in Slovenia are evidence that the internal condition, the true core of democracy, is its radical impossibility.

I shall try to illustrate this claim with three events from the complex of the current disintegration of the Yugoslav State and the social community. By event, I understand the simplification of some social fact by its introduction into the network of social and political conditions. The afore-mentioned democratic events are: One.) the demonstration in Montenegro in the autumn of 1988, where the workers demanded the resignation of the republic leadership, and who the police dispersed by force: two.) the »unprincipled coalition« formed by the liberal wing of the Yugoslav communists at its 17th Conference with the status quo forces: entire Yugoslav and three.) the gathering in »Cankarjev Dom« in Ljubljana. collectively organized by official and alternative political groups to »Oppose the state of emergency, for peace and coexistence in Kosovo«.

The demonstration in Titograd was understood in Slovenia /if I simplify somewhat/ as an attempt to export Milošević's model of authoritarian populism and that the police harassment of the workers was accepted as a democratic act which saved the minimum of democratic invention in Yugoslavia. Two things were essential for this understanding. First, that it was not based on the level of »true facts« (no one truly knew what happened in Montenegro, whether rebellious factors or justified social demands of the workers were overruled at the demonstration). Second, that the invention of the police was not even attempted to be ideologically justified (that is to say, as an act worthy of repentance, but which was urgent for the preservation of higher democratic values). In other words: democracy was not preserved by truncheons in Montenegro, but by our decision that it was preserved by truncheons. This decision was not based on the firm reality of facts nor on this or any other imaginary order, but only on itself. In essence, it was an empty, totally formal gesture by which we only accepted, as an essential condition of democracy, certain naked facticide.

Furthermore: The coalition Kučan - Šušvar - Army, which came about at the famous seventeenth Conference of the Yugoslav League of communists was in itself extremely unprincipled and by its context, antidemocratic. Despite this, it was received with relief, as it seemed it would at least temporarily stop Milošević's march

for Yugoslavia. But even during the acceptance of this coalition, the awareness that this unprincipled coalition had not yet in itself preserved a minimum of democracy was vital, and that it was preserved only by our decision that democracy is maintained also by alliances which cannot be justified.

The third event was the gathering in »Cankarjev Dom«. Its direct purpose was to oppose that which is trying to affirm itself, through the events in Kosovo, as the general model for solving all types of Yugoslav differences and discrepancies: forced unification with the assistance of the military-police and legal system. It was interesting to witness, for the first time, not only the tolerance of but also acknowledgement of the existant political plurality in Slovenia, at the afore-mentioned meeting. This gathering was the first step towards the institutionalising of political plurality. In other words: the gathering was the moment and the place where formal democracy in Slovenia - at least in its embrio - was actualized, whereby the different political standpoints also got their bodies. This minimal institutionalization, the materialization of formal-democratic efforts is expressed in the signature which unites the old political leagues and the new political subjects. The meeting could act as a material establishment of formal democracy only because it was simultaneously an expression of a new political will. On one hand, it was proof that formal democracy exists only as it materialises, as much as it has its own institutions. On the other hand, it also revealed that the condition for this materialization, the condition for the establishment of formal democracy, is a specific act of pure will. In this case it was the decision - which the liberal wing of Slovene official politics also noted - that things could no longer continue in that way, that a part of Yugoslavia was not willing to cooperate anymore in the systematic destruction of legal state.

I do not even attempt to deny that this decision had its support in reality, that it was as much a response to the hard politics of the authoritarian populism as it was to the soft politics of further party domination of social life. But the main part of the decision was, in my opinion, a specific moment which did not have its support in political reality. Its only support was the decision itself. This moment was best defined by someone who said that, »We cannot keep on blinding ourselves with brotherhood and unity, that realistic politics today are 'serbophobia' politics«. Here we should add only this: the 'serbophobia' is not a political category, it is not a category of political reality.

I am not interested in politics as such. I am interested in the meeting in Cankarjev Dom which, in my view, represents a rough model for the establishing of democracy.

It is a fact that 'serbophobia' is the feature which simply must be added to this »democratic invention«. There is, in my opinion, only one way to avoid the fall into nationalist and cheap political demagogy: to accept the notion of 'serbophobia' as something given without content or sense. We have to accept it as a radically contingent moment which is not founded in the political reality nor its imagery. It is necessary only in so far as it sprang out exactly at the moment of the establishment of democracy. In short, it is another name for democracy.

We could say, as Lefort did, that the foundation of democracy is in the impossibility to determine and to utter its essence. But it is quite another thing to say that democracy is

in its essence »undeterminable« because here and now we cannot do otherwise than to state that the moment of 'serbophobia' is a part of its constitution. With the latter statement the impossibility to define and to utter the essence of democracy fades away as something transcendent and appears as something belonging to this world. Democratic experience is therefore experience of the radical impossibility as something positive, as something given, that is to say, experience that democracy is not an unreachably ideal. We have nothing at hand but nevertheless everything is already here.

There is no doubt that democracy is only formal or it does not exist. The socialist giving of the true content to middle-class formal freedoms gave nothing but actual non-freedom. But these three events point to the fact that standing for only formal democracy without content is by no means empty in itself.

The symbolic language of formal-democratic relations can act only as much as its constitutive part is a specific moment, a specific decision - I shall call it »democratic engagement«. With this term I am not aiming at an active stand for democracy, or at true political and social struggles. Democratic engagement is a symbolic, purely formal gesture, with which we agree upon the fact that in the midst of democratic conditions, in the midst of the struggle for it, there perseveres a specific moment, a positive characteristic, which has nothing to do with democracy and its formal freedoms, but without which no democracy could exist.