Robert Havemann's "Ten Theses" on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the GDR (September 1, 1979)

Abstract

In an article written on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the GDR, scientist Robert Havemann, East Germany's most prominent dissident at the time, praises the GDR as a new beginning while simultaneously attacking its many authoritarian shortcomings. In doing so, he demands a return to socialist ideals based upon human rights and political freedom. At the end of the article, Havemann outlines some concrete steps the GDR could take toward a more democratic form of socialism, one of which would be the publication of these very "ten theses" in *Neues Deutschland*, the official mouthpiece of the SED. As it turned out, however, Havemann's theses were published a month later in the left-of-center West German newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau.*

Source

And the Last Bit of Trust Fades Away . . .

1. In the thirty years since its founding, the GDR has overcome many of the material and political consequences of the Second World War. By building up productive, modern industries and making considerable improvements in the area of agriculture, the GDR created the material foundation that constitutes the prerequisite for the step-by-step development of a free, socialist social order. In contrast to the FRG, the old system of class rule was not restored in the GDR. Here, that form of rule was abolished once and for all after the victory of the Allied forces over the Hitler dictatorship in 1945, and this was done with the approval of the vast majority of the people. Through the elimination of private ownership of the means of production, the material basis of capitalism was removed and the decisive foundation for the development of socialist production conditions was created.

2. The reconstruction of a country devastated by war demanded great sacrifices by the workers and peasants. West German and multinational corporations, which still hope to liberate the GDR according to their own vision, used every possible economic and political means to obstruct and hinder it. But the people's striving for security and peaceful cooperation proved stronger. An important step along the way was the international recognition of the GDR and the acceptance of both German states into the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki, the Final Act of which (The Helsinki Accords) is a program for general peace and the protection of human rights.

3. But economic and political developments in the GDR were obstructed not only from the outside and not only by the West German and international opponents of socialism. Stalinism—a common yet misleading word for the dictatorship of the party apparatus—was still in full bloom in the Soviet Union and, accordingly, in the countries occupied by Soviet troops, until 1956. The worst crimes of this tragic period were dealt with at the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. But the dictatorship of the central party apparatus, which is not subject to any democratic controls, continues to this day in the countries of real socialism.

4. As late as 1968—that is, nineteen years after the founding of the GDR—important basic rights, which were guaranteed in its first constitution, were abolished in a new constitution, including the right to strike and the right to an impartial court of justice, in which citizens can protest the measures of state organs. For the first time, the new constitution included a passage in which the party was declared the

leading power and the foundation of the state. […] With that, the SED became the state party. In the new constitution, Article 27 of the old constitution on freedom of expression was retained verbatim. […] But Section 106 of the criminal code on "agitation against the state" —which was made more restrictive this June—virtually rescinds Article 27. Any "discrimination" as regards social conditions is punishable by up to ten years' imprisonment. Court practice has shown that almost any criticism whatsoever of the policies of the party and the government—i.e., precisely that which is understood as freedom of expression throughout the world—can be ruled as "discrimination." Rosa Luxemburg once said, "Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently." The third amendment to the criminal code of June of this year also contains innumerable regulations threatening harsh penalties for [those who exercise] almost all of the remaining options for expressing public dissent.

5. It is difficult to estimate how many people in the GDR today yearn for the restoration of the old system of class rule here in our country as well and prefer the capitalist system of the FRG over real socialism. The suppression of any criticism outside of party and state organs, the crackdown on critical writers, the prohibition of an opposition in the Volkskammer, the non-existence of even a single critical and independent newspaper, the conditions under which the candidates for legislative assemblies are nominated and elected, the virtual ban on travel to the West (except for pensioners and a limited number of privileged people and functionaries)—all of this and more gives rise to the impression that the party and state leadership in the GDR consider their opponents to be great and threatening in number. The "Wall" is still closed. There is great fear that, under other conditions, the mass flight of 1961 could repeat itself.

6. It is very obvious that all the repression and limitations on freedom bring about the opposite of what they were intended to achieve. They are supposed to serve the security of the state, but in fact they are the main cause of the increasing insecurity of the state. Under such conditions, even the last bit of trust between citizens and the state will ultimately fade away—from both sides, in fact. "He who does not trust will not be trusted in return"—this is how it was put by the Chinese scholar Lao Tse, who lived two and a half millennia ago. But the citizens' trust of their government is the most valuable of political assets. This is the basis not only for internal but also external security, without which no state can survive in the long run. Because the trust it receives from allied and friendly states depends on the trust it receives from its own citizens.

7. The political system that exists in the GDR, as well as in some other eastern European countries, calls itself "real socialism." This implies that "ideal socialism" exists only in the dreams of sectarian utopianists but not in reality. Whoever is dedicated to this dream and thus expresses his dissatisfaction with real, existing socialism is only thought to be helping the opponents of socialism. But in this very contempt for and suspicion of the dream of an ideal socialism, both the opponents and enemies of socialism and the ideologues of "real socialism" are in complete agreement. They laugh at the simpletons who believe that socialism is possible without oppression, without a police system and a wall. Either freedom or socialism, they say, but never both at once. And their proof for this claim is "real socialism."

8. The communist parties in Western Europe, which have developed a new political approach that could be called Euro-communism, find themselves in a difficult position in light of the growing tensions in the countries of "real socialism," especially after the violent suppression of the "Prague Spring" in 1968. On the one hand, they have to make it believable that the socialism toward which they are striving upholds—and even absolutely guarantees—all the freedoms that have previously been won: freedom of expression, freedom of the press, the neutrality of the state in questions of worldview and faith, freedom of assembly and association, the right to freedom of movement and choice of employment, including the right to emigrate, the right to strike, the equality of all citizens before the law, and the elimination of all forms of privilege. But by drafting this picture of a liberal socialism, they assume precisely the position that the ideologues of "real socialism" ridicule as left-wing sectarian, petty bourgeois, utopian, illusory

dreaming and that they suspect, moreover, of serving the interests of the class enemy, either consciously or unconsciously. […]

9. The German Democratic Republic is on the way to a future that is called "socialism" and that lies far ahead of the West German Federal Republic and the other western European industrial countries. If we would finally start to build up the kind of socialism that our Euro-communist comrades are dreaming of – so that they would no longer feel the need to dissociate themselves from our socialism – then the GDR, together with the other socialist countries, could become the pacesetter in the great socialist transformation of Europe. We just have to take the long overdue second step, the step to democracy, by eliminating uncontrolled rule by the party apparatus. We will continue to need the party and the state apparatus for a long time, and we will have to endure them with all their inevitable shortcomings and contradictions. The withering away of the state is a long, drawn-out process. But it can only proceed if every form of despotic rule is checked and nipped in the bud by broad-based democratic controls. Under present conditions, the state will never wither away. On the contrary, it is growing and taking possession of everything. It is omnipresent, vigilantly hears everything, sees everything, and registers everything in secret electronic databases. It conjures in our fears the eerie world that Orwell described in his book *1984.*

10. Capitalism has entered its final phase. Soon there will no longer be any peaceful solutions to its problems. Inflation, currency chaos, mass unemployment, energy and raw materials crises, pollution; a wasteful throw-away society on the one hand, and hunger and misery for millions in poor countries on the other—all of this in a world that proves itself incapable of mastering its problems on a daily basis and that is perfectly preparing only one thing: its own self-destruction in a nuclear war. It is frightening that we are hardly utilizing the short time we still have left to avert this great disaster. In this situation, socialism is our last and only hope. But that means we cannot afford to wait any longer. We have to start here and now to realize the great dream of socialism, holding true to the words of August Bebel: "No socialism without democracy, no democracy without socialism."

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the GDR, here are some suggestions for the first steps along the way:

1. Abolishment of all restrictions on freedom of expression by making corresponding amendments to the criminal code, especially by repealing the unconstitutional Sections 106 (agitation against the state), 219 (unlawful contact), and 220 (public vilification [of the state]).

2. The release from prison and rehabilitation of all people convicted of violating these sections.

3. The abolishment of all censorship and the dissolution of the offices for copyright.

4. The establishment of an independent newspaper.

5. The lowering of the age for travel to the West.

6. The publication of these theses in *Neues Deutschland*.

Source: Robert Havemann, "So schwindet der letzte Rest des Vertrauens dahin . . ." (September 1, 1979), *Frankfurter Rundschau*, October 3, 1979, p. 17. Republished with permission.

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