

Dissidents imprisoned

Letters on "democratic" USSR misleading

In response to the December 8 letters to the editor proclaiming that the Soviet Union is indeed a democratic country: one cannot possibly refute such a comment. The only problem that arises in my mind is why people are not rushing to immigrate to such a free and developed country.

One writer remarked that unemployment is nonexistent in the USSR. How could this be a problem when the jobless are labelled parasites of the land and sentenced to prison camps where they are joined by millions of other Russian prisoners-of-conscience? Imagine how Canada's unemployment figures would be reduced if those who wished to express opinions counter to government policies were imprisoned. This would mean that even those individuals who have written letters to *Excalibur* in support of the Soviet Union would be imprisoned if Canada were as "democratic" as the Soviet Union.

Of course, in such a "free and democratic" country, religious activities are observed — by the KGB. It is especially not difficult for the KGB to monitor synagogues, since there is only one open in Moscow, Russia's largest city, and merely a handful throughout the entire nation which includes 2½ million Jews.

I suppose to me, this proves that those writers are correct who argue that the highest degree of democracy is socialism. Unfortunately, it is difficult for this writer to define the type of government practiced in the Soviet Union. I wonder what Marx would say about the Soviet bureaucracy and the beautiful automobiles owned by Brezhnev. I suppose this could not be considered "private property" or elitism.

It is interesting that people often find the same flaws in other people as they find in themselves. Of course, Canada has its problems because of democracy but the USSR has the same, even as the true democratic country or socialist country.

One writer asked why the hunger-strikers concerned themselves mostly with Soviet Jewry. During the strike our main focus was Soviet Jewry. Perhaps as Jews we thought that this should be our primary focus. Apparently, Eric Walberg did not examine our

material too closely. Our first request from Trudeau was to denounce the Russian violations of the Helsinki Agreement, which includes all oppressed within the Soviet Union. Whenever questioned, we replied that we were striking for human rights. This message was included in the daily telegrams sent to Trudeau and publicized in the newspapers.

Another point noted by the three writers is that there are more Jewish students in Russia than in Israel. That does not appear to be too difficult to comprehend, since comparing those two countries is like comparing Rhode Island to the entire United States; it cannot be compared at all. These students "profess" their Judaism since they are compelled to by the Soviet authorities.

These authors deny that Russia is violating the Helsinki Agreement and has not denied travel and basic human rights to its people. If this is the case, why are many refusniks (Jews refused emigration visas) sitting in jails without trials nor charged and why are those finally granted visas to emigrate to Israel, forced to give up their Russian citizenship and required to pay a high financial sum to do so?

And if the Soviet Union is so democratic, why is all the media controlled by the State? If Canada followed the same democratic principles of Russia, I doubt if these letters would appear in a newspaper.

At least we took a stand. I wonder what Eric has done for any minority? If he or any individual wants to help those really oppressed, perhaps we could work together

instead of criticizing one another. An argument that I could put forth is that we have constantly, throughout history, battled with anti-semitism. If we could rid

ourselves of this ugly phenomena, then hopefully other racial gaps could be closed.

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