

July 26, 1978

The Editor  
THE TIMES  
London,

Sir,- Though I can scarcely expect you to find space in your columns for the instruction Mr. William Wallace (July 24) evidently needs, I shall appreciate it if you can do so for a brief reply. I have certainly never contended that generally authoritarian governments are more likely to secure individual liberty than democratic ones, but rather the contrary. This does not mean, however, that in some historical circumstances personal liberty may not have been better protected under a <sup>authoritarian</sup> ~~historian~~ than under a democratic government. This has occasionally been true since the beginning of democracy in ancient Athens, where the liberty of the subjects was undoubtedly safer under the "thirty tyrants" than under the democracy which killed Socrates and sent dozens of its best men into exile by arbitrary decrees. In modern times there have of course been many instances of authoritarian governments under which personal liberty was safer than under many democracies. I have never heard anything to the contrary of the early years of Dr. Salazar's early government in Portugal and I doubt whether there is today in any democracy in Eastern Europe or on the continents of Africa, South America or Asia (with the exception of Israel, Singapore and Hongkong) <sup>as well</sup> as well secured as it was then in Portugal. More recently I have not been able to find a single person even in much maligned Chile who did not agree that personal freedom was much greater under Pinochet than it had been under Allende. Nor have I heard any sensible person claim that in the principalities of Monaco or Lichtenstein, which I am told are not precisely democratic, personal liberty is smaller than anywhere else!

That a limited democracy is probably the best possible known form of government does not mean that we can have it everywhere, or even that it is itself a supreme value rather than the best means to secure peace, a defensor pacis or instrument of peaceful change of government. Indeed our doctrinaire democrats clearly ought to take more seriously the question when democracy is possible. Perhaps they can be induced to reflect on this by pointing to the truism that, except in the direct democracy based on an assembly of all citizens, a democracy can never create itself, but must always be the product of the authoritarian decision of a few -- and be this only the decisions about the questions to be asked and the procedure to be followed in a plebiscite. After all, some democracies have been made possible only by the military power of some generals. And my old doubts whether a democracy can be maintained in a country which has not by different institutions been taught the tradition of the rule of law has certainly been only confirmed by recent history.

Yours faithfully,

F.A. Hayek