



**Defending Democracy
A Meditation on Basic Democratic Values
in Times of Political and Economic Insecurity**

Literary Collage with texts by Mahatma Gandhi, Robert F. Kennedy, Hermynia zur Mühlen, Erich Mühsam, Alfred Polgar, Carl von Ossietzky, Joseph Roth, Hans Sahl, Kurt Tucholsky, Lasantha Wikrematunge, and others

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After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the victory parade of democracy seemed unstoppable. 20 years later, the initial euphoria of a world-historical break-through of basic democratic thinking has given way to great disillusionment. Globalization, rising unemployment (especially in the Southern and South-Eastern European countries), retrenchment in social programs, marginalization of large societal groups (this includes educationally disadvantaged youth from socially weak families in Germany as well as highly qualified unemployed young college graduates in Spain): all this has led to shrinking trust in democracy and its institutions. Investigations by the Federal Office of Statistics have shown that the acceptance of democracy has decreased in Germany also. While in the year 2000 9% of those questioned in the old federal states preferred a form of government other than democracy, this had increased to 17% already by 2005. During the same period, this number rose from 27% to 41% in the new federal states.

Since 2008, social and economic upheavals have been further aggravated by the bank crisis and the sovereign debt crisis. The economic crisis has developed into a crisis of democracy. In many places, the expression "post-democracy" has been used.

In 1932, the Austrian-Jewish jurist Hans Kelsen observed, in regard to the developments in the Weimar Republic: "Democracy is that form of government which least resists its adversaries. It seems to be its tragic fate that it must nurse even its worst enemy on its own breast." In exile in the U.S., he pointedly formulated the dilemma of democracy: "Democracy cannot defend itself by abandoning itself."

Especially in these times of political and economic uncertainty, when our Western system of an open, democracy-based society and the values holding up such a system are threatened from many sides, it seems important to remind ourselves of the great achievement democracy is, and that it is worth fighting for. We can succeed in this specially by resorting to texts of authors and thinkers who, in their time, fought against undermining tendencies of dissolution and the erosion of the republic by totalitarian forces. The cry for simple solutions, the longing for a strong man who liberates us from the complex trap of a globalized world, is growing louder. The program "Defending Democracy" wants to take a stand against that.

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