Editorial

Church-State relations in Czechoslovakia have been affected by Communist Party policy since the Party took power in 1948. The largest religious body which confronted the new regime was the Roman Catholic Church, numbering over eight million members, including 300,000 Uniates, in 1948. Although coexistence between Church and State seemed at first possible thanks to the inclusion of a clause guaranteeing religious freedom in the new Constitution, conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the State arose when all church lands were confiscated, all Catholic schools suppressed and religious instruction in schools banned. State commissars were appointed to administer every diocese, thus undermining the bishops' position; all lay organizations were suppressed; pastoral letters were censored. At the end of 1949 a new law governing Church-State relations was adopted, according to which a State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs was established. Clergy appointments had now to be confirmed by the State: an oath of loyalty to the State was required and a salary provided for those appointed. The budgets of religious organizations had now to be approved by the State and centres for the training of clergy were subjected to State supervision. Before Christmas 1949 Church and State clashed: the Roman Catholic bishops declared that the new law conflicted with God's law. Over the following four years most of the bishops who supported Pope Pius XII's condemnation of communism were removed. Dioceses, bereft of their bishops, were provided with vicar-generals – men who were unlikely to irritate the government. With the Catholic hierarchy undermined, the government was able to close all seminaries save two, disband most of the religious orders, and imprison priests who did not "cooperate", thus leaving many parishes without pastoral care.

The Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia were not affected in the same way as the Roman Catholic Church. They welcomed the Communist Party's promise of equality for all religious bodies, and were not opposed to many of the aims of the new regime, which, in the view of some of them held out hope of a more just society. The 1949 law was accepted by almost all the Protestant Churches and cooperation with the government encouraged. But this happy marriage was soon marred by friction: like the Roman Catholics, Protestant leaders could not be appointed without State approval; the atheist propaganda, which multiplied in the 1950's, exacerbated Church-State relations; religious education and work among the young were beset with difficulties.

The position of the Church within a communist society and its accompanying problems, was the subject to which a theologian in Czechoslovakia devoted his life. Joseph Hromadka, a member of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (see pp. 7-9 for some recent information about this denomination) refused to accept the view that Christianity and communism could not work together for the betterment of human life and society. For him Socialism expressed in political terms some of the Gospel's ideals : for example, in his view, the poor of the earth would be more justly treated in such a system. His work helped promote the dialogue between Christians and Marxists, and it was his influence and that of his Church which played an important part in the events which led up to the period of liberalization under Dubcek, the "Prague Spring" of 1968.

All the Churches in Czechoslovakia were able to spread their wings during this "Spring" : members of the clergy and laity, who had been imprisoned, were released; the Churches were able to publish more easily thanks to the relaxation of censorship; it was less difficult to enter one of the theological faculties; discussions between Christians and Marxists were held in public; the Uniate Church was allowed to come back into existence (see Michael Bourdeaux's article pp. 4-6). But since the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the Churches have been subjected once more to government restrictions and much that was gained during the "Spring" has been lost. Party ideologists now argue that religion and Socialism cannot coexist : religion is described as "a direct expression of the anti-socialist opposition" in the publication *Rovnost*. Joseph Hromadka (d. 1969), who spent his life trying to show that no such "opposition" existed, would have been deeply saddened by such an accusation.

XHJ