

Chronicle

Summaries of Events and Background Information

The Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR Lives On

A new wave of persecution has been initiated by the Andropov administration, with the aim of putting an end once and for all to any attempt by the Soviet people to assert their rights as citizens. This shows once again that it does not pay to expect any good to come from a communist regime, whether it is that of the "nationalities question expert" — Stalin, or the "grain expert" — Khrushchev, or the "man of letters" — Brezhnev, or the "intellectual policeman" — Andropov.

One might object that Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Andropov should not all be put on the same level — after all, the last three did not have people shot. But there was shooting both in Stalin's time and after. In Khrushchev's day they shot the inhabitants of Novochoerkassk and Alexandrovsk, in Brezhnev's time they shot Armenian terrorists.

Then the "intellectuals" of the KGB discovered that the refinement of brutality and inhumanity in the methods of forced psychiatric treatment were more effective and less noisy than the Stalinist shootings. So, they don't shoot people. But the regime has not stopped shooting out of softheartedness, but out of fear that there may be a "day of reckoning" lying in wait for them, and that when it comes, suddenly they will be answerable. So the Soviet authorities are trying to come to terms with their discordant citizens on the quiet, through someone else: doctors treat healthy people, criminals are put away in camps and prisons, hooligans and drunkards terrorise people at home and at work, but it's not the authori-

ties' fault. This is in addition to the reinforced "official" persecutions: arrests, interrogations, being followed, house-searches, pressure at work, and on children at school.

Of course at this point in time the work of human rights groups is, to put it mildly, increasingly difficult — it is hard to gather information, hard to keep it, and even harder to get it out to the West.

So has the "intellectual" Andropov managed to do away with the defence of human rights in the USSR? Of course not. The authorities may succeed in imprisoning, exiling or forcing into emigration a few of their citizens, but these few are not the real cause of the human rights activities. The one and only cause of these activities is the Soviet system itself. While that system exists, as it has existed illegally and fruitlessly for the last sixty-six years, the emergence and existence of human rights groups and of individual people who object to the illegalities will continue, as long as Soviet power remains.

The hope of building communism with a human face is, in my view, as senseless and sinister as wanting to breed a crocodile with a human face. Who, and for what purpose, could want such a monster? Obviously, only some "expert" or "intellectual". The struggle against the "monsters", whatever faces they may have, will continue — the gates of Hell shall not prevail against those with God's gift of goodness and purity in their hearts.

The Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR,

founded in 1977 by Orthodox priest Father Gleb Yakunin, Deacon Varsonofi (secular name Boris Khaibulin) and layman Viktor Kapitanchuk, has as its purpose now, as then, the defence of the rights of believers of all confessions guaranteed in the laws and the Constitution of the USSR, against the illegal acts of the atheist state.* For this purpose the CCDBR has studied, and it still studying, the legal aspects of the existence of religious groups and individual believers in the USSR. For all the letters from believers, giving information about the violation of human rights, documents are compiled and sent to the appropriate state body, together with a request from the CCDBR that the illegal activity be stopped. When the authorities refuse to take the necessary steps, the Christian Committee makes the injustices public by means of documents published in the West and the *Chronicle of Current Events* published in the USSR. During the period of its existence the Committee has published nine volumes of documents.†

In the great majority of cases, not only do the Soviet authorities completely ignore the Christian Committee's appeals, but each appeal sparks off a new wave of repression against the Committee members. Within a year of the formation of the CCDBR, all its members were continually subject to varying, but always non-judicial and therefore illegal, forms of pressure: they were blatantly followed, victimised at work, interrogated, threatened, their homes searched. This action on the part of the KGB was

prompted by the growing popularity of the Christian Committee with believers of all confessions in the USSR and by the documents of the Committee which set out the true situation of believers. For instance, the letter sent to the delegates of the WCC Assembly in Nairobi, Father Gleb's report on "The Position of the Russian Orthodox Church",* the appeal to the Catholic Cardinals concerning the election of Pope John Paul II, and many others.

At one stage (Deacon Varsonofi by then having stepped down from the Committee for health reasons) the founder-members Fr Gleb Yakuin and Viktor Kapitanchuk, foreseeing that they might be arrested, arranged for two new members, who were already helping with the work, to join the Committee: Priest Vasili Fonchenkov and believer Vadim Shcheglov. And indeed the founder-members were not mistaken. A few months later after a series of house searches Fr Gleb Yakunin was arrested. Following his arrest, another member expressed his wish to join the Committee—priest Nikolai Gainov. The authorities continued their pressure on the Christian Committee and soon Viktor Kapitanchuk was arrested. During his investigation and at his trial he completely renounced his work with the CCDBR, and he described how, and through whom, he had sent the Committee's documents to the West; as a result he received a five-year conditional sentence. Fr Gleb, who had been tried earlier but who did not renounce his activities, received a sentence of five years strict regime labour camp and five years internal exile (which at times is harsher than the camp).

The authorities congratulated themselves on their victory, hoping that this was the end of the CCDBR, since the three members still at liberty, Fr Vasili, Fr Nikolai and Vadim Shcheglov, left with no channels of communication (these had been Viktor Kapitanchuk's job and he had revealed them all), no typewriters (these had been

*See article by Jane Ellis in *RCL* Vol. 8 No. 4, 1980, pp. 279-98 — *Ed.*

†In the form in which they were published in the West, the documents appeared in twelve volumes, although Vol. 3 consisted of English translations of selected documents. They totalled 1282 pages. Additionally, a few documents were received for inclusion in Vol. 13, which has not yet appeared in a final form. These volumes were published by Washington Research Center, 3101 Washington Street, San Francisco, California 94115. A further selection of documents translated into English was published in 1982 as *The CCDBR Documents*, translated by Maria Belaeffa, edited by Alan Scarfe, Door of Hope Press and Society for the Study of Religion under Communism, Glendale/Orange California, 1982 — *Ed.*

*Full title "Report of Father Gleb Yakunin to the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR on the Current Situation of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Prospects for a Religious Renaissance in Russia", 15 August, 1979, published in *DCCDBR* Vol. 11, pp. 1128-1168. A partial but extensive translation into English is given in the same volume, pp. xvi-xxx — *Ed.*

confiscated during searches), no information (for some time it had all been coming through to Kapitanchuk), would not be able to do anything. Then, in this apparently hopeless situation, help came. It came from those believers who saw in the Christian Committee and its work the defender of their rights. Many of them had previously helped in the work of the Committee, by sending information about violations of believers' rights to the members or printing their documents, and now they openly offered to become part of the Committee. So another ten people joined the membership of the Committee. They observed strict security, and so that the authorities would not be able to identify them and stop them working for the Christian Committee, it was decided not to reveal their names. The CCDBR revived: gradually letters began to appear from believers, new typewriters were bought with believers' donations, and the documents of the Committee began to appear in print.

On 29 June this year, since the authorities were subjecting him and his family to continual harassment, Christian Committee member Vadim Shcheglov was forced to emigrate from the USSR.

Before Shcheglov left the USSR, the members of the CCDBR jointly decided that he, as representative of the Committee, should turn to believers in the West with appeals for help to organise, as it were, a foreign branch of the CCDBR. This help

could take various forms: collected information about violations of believers' rights in the USSR (through letters from friends or relatives or accounts by citizens who have recently left the USSR); or simply membership of the Committee, each doing what he can for its work; and later, when it becomes possible, providing ways of publishing the CCDBR bulletin.

The Christian Committee believe that the wider and fuller the publicity given to the documentation of violations of believers' rights in the USSR, the better the West will be acquainted with the situation of believers in communist countries, and in turn the more active and effective its assistance will be. For this cause the CCDBR is denying itself the monopoly of published materials on the violation of the rights of believers in the USSR, and appeals to all publishers and organisations to do likewise. The Committee is willing to supply, through its representatives, the necessary copies of all its documents.

Taking the opportunity given to me, on behalf of millions of persecuted believers in the USSR, of the CCDBR, and of myself, I thank all religious people, all charitable people, organisations and individuals for their prayers and Christian help, and the press and radio of western countries for their activity and assistance in publishing and distributing the materials of the Committee.

VADIM SHCHEGLOV

Translated from Russian by Carolyn Burch

New Hard-Line Policy towards Catholic Clergy in Lithuania

In 1982 Soviet policy towards the Catholic Church in Lithuania seemed to be taking a turn for the better in many ways. In June 1982 eighteen seminarians were ordained as priests — the highest number permitted by the Soviet authorities since 1963. The Lithuanian Catholic Church was allowed to publish two religious works — a 152-page directory and liturgical calendar (the first since 1939) in September and a ten-volume Lithuanian translation of the Catholic missal in October. The latter made it possible for priests to conduct masses in Lithuanian regularly for the first time.

However, the high point of 1982 was un-

doubtedly the appointment of a new bishop (Antanas Vaičius) to the long-vacant diocese of Telšiai and permission for Archbishop Sladkevičius, exiled for 23 years, to return to his diocese of Kaišiadorys.* It appeared, even to the Vatican, that a period of "wider toleration by the communist authorities" might well have begun.

However, on 26 January 1983 such hopes were dealt a decisive blow. Fr Svarinskas, one of the five priests who founded the

*For a detailed account of this, see *RCL* Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 89-90 — *Ed.*