

Catholic proposals for a solution to the problems of the Church in Czechoslovakia

A petition for religious freedom began circulating in Czechoslovakia in January 1988. By April over half a million people had signed it. It is the largest civil rights initiative Czechoslovakia has ever known.

1. We demand separation of Church and State. All other demands follow from this.

2. We demand that State organisations do not prevent the appointment of new bishops in Czechoslovakia.

3. We demand that State organisations do not interfere with the appointment of priests.

4. We demand that State organisations do not interfere with the selection of students, nor the number of students enrolled at theological faculties. Also that they do not interfere with the choice of teachers.

5. We demand that the theological faculty in Olomouc be re-opened.

6. We demand the introduction of a permanent body of deacons.

7. We demand that the religious orders be rehabilitated, and permitted to accept new members as in neighbouring GDR and Poland.

8. We demand that the right of believers to form lay religious associations be recognised.

9. We demand that religious instruction take place outside school, either in church, a priest's home or in another building. Parents should apply direct to the parish for religious instruction for their children (not to the school authorities).

10. We demand that priests be allowed to visit prisons and hospitals whenever prisoners, patients or their relatives request it.

11. We demand the right to hold retreats and training programmes for the laity.

12. We demand that every congregation be headed by a parish council, to assist priests in tackling parish problems.

13. We demand the right to establish contacts with Christian organisations worldwide.

14. We demand the right to organise and participate in pilgrimages, either individually or collectively.

15. We demand that believers be provided with the religious literature they need, that a religious publishing house under church control be set up and that religious libraries and reading rooms be opened.

16. We demand that the production and distribution of religious texts be no longer considered a criminal offence.

17. We demand the right to import freely religious literature from abroad.

18. We demand the right to TV and radio programmes covering religious events.

19. We demand an end to jamming of Vatican radio programmes and Sunday masses from Radio Free Europe.

20. We demand that priests and laity be permitted to spread Christian teaching.

21. We demand that confiscated church buildings, retreat centres, theological faculty buildings and buildings belonging to religious orders be returned.

22. We demand that new churches be built where they are needed.

23. We demand an end to the indiscriminate removal of crosses, sculptures and small chapels from our towns and roadways.

24. We demand that the Secretary for Church Affairs be prevented from interfering in the appointment, trans-

fer and activity of priests.

25. We demand the immediate and complete rehabilitation of illegally sentenced priests, members of orders and active members of the laity.

26. We demand an end to discrimination against believers in employment, particularly in education.

27. We demand that believers be allowed to address particular problems which concern them, i.e. the right of petition.

28. We demand that laws which regard religious activity as criminal be dropped.

29. We demand that certain legal articles be amended.

30. We demand that all existing laws be brought into line with international pacts on human rights.

31. We demand that a committee composed of State and Church representatives be formed to discuss and make appropriate decisions.

The Slovak Catholic Movement in the Fourth Year of *Perestroika*

Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* programme is in its fourth year. Czecho-Slovak politicians have expressed their support for it and have even announced their own version of *perestroika*. This cannot have been easy for them as in the late seventies they had described their administration as the most successful period in the history of socialist construction in Czecho-Slovakia. What then is to be restructured? For from its outset there have been doubts as to whether restructuring is being seriously undertaken.

A change in the attitude of the Communist Party and the state machinery towards Catholics would be evidence that it is being undertaken seriously. This would affect broad sections of Slovak society and the party would not have to relinquish much of its power. But what changes has *perestroika* brought so far?

Since 1949 the so-called Church Laws have been in force in Czecho-Slovakia. These were adopted at the height of the Stalinist period and were to form the framework for

complete state control of the churches. According to these laws, all religious activity requires the prior permission of the state. The state administration operates a system of church secretaries from regional through to district level. Church secretaries alone have the right to decide what to permit and what not to permit. In this they are not guided by the law; in no case are the church and believers legally entitled to state permission to operate. Neither the church nor believers has any say in the selection of church secretaries. The Communist Party fills these posts with its people and they make decisions in keeping with the party's general political guidelines. They do not need to provide reasons for their decisions. In this respect nothing has changed and there are no changes planned. Political guidelines on the activity of church secretaries are now perhaps even more cautious, yet breaking these rulings is now more tolerated since the Catholic Church has never fully submitted to them.

The Communist Party's current religious policy was fixed at the