

## Hungarians in the USSR

The multi-ethnic region of Transcarpathia lies between the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains and the upper reaches of the Tisza River. Before 1918 it was an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary. When the kingdom was dismembered after the First World War Transcarpathia was transferred to the new Czechoslovak state. During the Second World War the region returned to Hungarian control, but in 1945 was annexed by the Soviet Union. Thereafter the ethnic Hungarian religious communities were severed from their mother churches in Hungary and the whole region was virtually sealed off from the outside world. Little reliable information about these communities reached the West in the *pre-glasnost* era.

Of the total population of over 1.1 million, approximately 162,000 (14.4 per cent) are Hungarian speakers, while, according to 1978 figures, Ukrainians form the majority (76.5 per cent). It is estimated that 60-70,000 of the Hungarians are members of the Reformed Church, and 60,000 of the Catholic Church. Expression of Hungarian identity and religious life has been repressed for much of the past 40 years. Concessions to the Hungarian community have gathered pace, however, during the Gorbachev era. Cross-border cooperation in areas such as publishing has increased, and in Hungary both the religious and the general press have shown a growing interest in the past and present of Transcarpathia. Leaders of the Catholic, Reformed and small evangelical churches in Hungary have recently been allowed to travel to Transcarpathia to give moral support to their brethren and deliver large quantities of religious literature.

The article printed below was

taken from a longer piece by Gyögy Dupka entitled 'Vázlatos jelentés a Szovjetunióban élő magyarok helyzetéről' ('An Outline Report on the Situation of Hungarians in the Soviet Union'), which appeared in the Hungarian independent journal *Kapu* in December 1988. The author is a Hungarian writer from Transcarpathia.

It is reassuring that in Transcarpathia the official attitude towards the churches is changing. The regional council for the protection of monuments has brought under its patronage about 50 Roman Catholic and Reformed churches built in the romanesque and gothic styles. Some of them date from the 13th and 14th centuries, and the congregations cover the costs of their maintenance through their own contributions.

The churches act as independent, officially tolerated but not supported, institutions of the Transcarpathian Hungarians. In their own particular way they assist the survival of the Hungarian language in very harsh circumstances. The Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches and their places of worship are the last bastions of the Hungarian language in communities such as Rahó (Rakhiv), Huszt (Khust), Királyháza (Koroleve) and Szerednye (Serednie), to name but four. In these places Hungarian has not been taught since October 1944; Hungarian speakers attend Ukrainian schools, and can use their deteriorating mother-tongue only within their families. The Transcarpathian Hungarians are not as religious as the Carpathian Ukrainians, although almost everybody,

in town and village alike, marks Easter and Christmas as family occasions.

The established churches of the region have no publications at their disposal. The last two years have seen a growing amount of news and information about their church life appearing in Hungary's church press (*Vigilia, Új Ember, Református Egyház, Reformátusok Lapja, Confessio, Lelkész Tájékoztató, H. N. Adventista Egyház*, etc.). The running of the local churches is watched over by the Council for Religious Affairs, which operates alongside the Executive Committee of the Transcarpathian Regional Soviet. This same body also takes a coordinating role in developing inter-church relations.

#### *The Roman Catholic Church*

According to data provided by local priests, 31 of the former 41 Catholic parishes are in operation at present. Ten priests over 70 years of age tour the parishes performing the duties of a parish priest.\* Recently they were joined by a 28-year-old Pole, who had attended the Riga seminary.\*\* Before him the last priest came to

---

\*Since this article was written two of the aged Hungarian priests have died, leaving only eight. They are József Csáti (Munkács — Mukhachiv), Ágoston Horvath (Ungvár — Užhorod), Antal Heveli (Szolyva — Svaliava), Lajos Kórolyi (Kaszopolyana — Koszovszkaya Polyana), István Lánckzi (Beregszász — Berehove), Gyula Hasák (Nagyszőlős — Vynohradiv), Lajos Hudra (Aknaszlatina — Szolotvina), János Maczejkó (Királymező — Koroleve). Frs Csáti and Heveli conduct Mass in German in Bortháza, Felsőkvepec and Pósháza. Fr Maczejkó does likewise in Királymező and Németmokra, [Ed.].

Transcarpathia in 1944, and the fear is that within a few years the parishes will have no priests at all.

After the death of Tibor Zavodnyik in Ungvár (Užhorod), the 76-year-old József Csáti, parish priest of Munkács (Mukhachiv) became the new senior. He began his theological studies in Innsbruck, finishing them in Budapest. The question of replacements depends, according to the people in the region, on the present primate of Hungary. Furthermore they believe that the talks started by the late Cardinal Lékai with the authorities in Moscow must be continued. (Note how the training of six students sent annually to the Budapest Rabbi Seminary was arranged by the Soviet Jewish community.)

#### *The Transcarpathian Reformed Church*

In Transcarpathia there are 81 communities with 81 churches and altogether 21 pastors. Of the 21, ten are over 70 years of age, one is 62 and the rest are between 30 and 54. These younger priests have no formal theological qualifications, but are the trainees of the older priests. Their training has its own particular character. They were ordained by the bishop in office at the time. The present bishop, Dr Pál Forgon, lives in Beregszász (Berehove) and maintains warm relations with the Reformed Church in Hungary on his church's behalf. There are personal contacts too: recently believers in Hungary donated a large number of complete

---

\*\*Peter Zsarnowszki (Szerdnye — Serednie). He conducts Mass in Polish for the largely Slovak villages of Nagyberczna (Veliky Bereznyy), Perecseny (Perechyn) and Szerdnye, [Ed.].

Bibles and hymnbooks to Transcarpathia, and the religious periodical *Confessio* frequently publishes selections by Transcarpathian writers. In the latter half of 1988 each individual was permitted to bring in a Bible. In the towns of Transcarpathia the bells can now be rung for services. This year [1988 — *Ed.*] two students from the region began their studies at the Budapest Theological College.

### *The Russian Orthodox Church*

As is well known, in February 1949 the priests of the Greek Catholic Church fused their church, with over 400,000 Carpatho-Ukrainian members, into the Orthodox Church. Nonetheless we cannot ignore the fact that many village inhabitants in Transcarpathia, who according to their identity papers today are Ukrainian, consider themselves Hungarian. Let us not forget that Hungarian speaking members of the abolished Uniate Church automatically became members of the Russian Orthodox Church, e.g. in Tisza-bökény, Batár, Nevetlen, Csepe, Újlak, Salánk, Nagyrát, Homok, etc. In these villages, or rather in the churches there, services are held in Hungarian, using the old Hungarian language Greek Catholic prayer books and recent publications brought in from Hungary. At present in Transcarpathia four Orthodox priests say mass in Hungarian in 14 villages. (I would note that even today the Hungarian speakers consider themselves Greek Catholics.)

### *Free Church Sects*

There are numerous sects, congregations and groups in which Hung-

arian speakers are well represented. The Adventist Congregation is a major force, with large groups in Rákos (Rakhiv), Ilonca, Munkács (Mukhachiv), Beregszász (Berehove), Muszaly, Bucsaháza [ . . . ] for example Illés Pircsák, the leading preacher of the Beregszász group, who maintains contact with the Adventists in Hungary. The local Baptists and Pentecostal congregations also have Hungarian speakers among their members. Groups of Jehovah's Witnesses, whose religion is deemed unauthorised, are active in Hungarian and mixed villages without any specifically Hungarian content. They are found in the villages of Rákos (Rakoshyn), Barkaszó, Szernye, Gut, Beregsom, Csonkapapi (Chop) and elsewhere. Hardly any Jewish Hungarians remain in Transcarpathia: they settled in Hungary or in the West.

Since this document was written the Hungarian primate, Cardinal László Paskai has visited the region as a guest of the Russian Orthodox Church and in response to an invitation issued by Soviet Politburo member Aleksandr Yakov'lev. For years direct contacts between the churches of Hungary and Transcarpathia were prohibited by the Soviet authorities. The Reformed Bishop Károly Tóth was the first church leader to visit the region when he travelled there in 1974 in his capacity as General Secretary of the Christian Peace Conference. He subsequently visited the area every few years, each time bringing with him a small quantity of literature. In 1979 he proposed to the Soviet authorities that Reformed ordinands might be allowed to train in his Budapest seminary, but only ten years later were two young pastors permitted to do so.

When Cardinal Paskai visited the region earlier this year he was accompanied by two van loads of literature. During the course of negotiations with the authorities he gained permission for ordinands to train in Hungary and for priests from Hungary to work permanently in Transcarpathia — and five are now working in parishes in this region. More unexpectedly he gave public recognition to the banned Eastern-rite Catholic Church of Ukraine by twice meeting unofficially with Bishop Holovach, one of its 'underground' leaders.

Other denominations are also developing contacts across the border. In 1988 representatives of the Free Church Council in Hungary transported 2,000 scriptures to Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal congregations. One Adventist pastor from Transcarpathia is now participating in the theology correspondence course of the Free Church Council. It also now seems that the Soviet authorities will allow all religious literature published in Hungary to enter Transcarpathia without hindrance.

JOHN V. EIBNER

## Buddhism becomes the Cambodian State Religion

Among the changes to the Cambodian constitution adopted at an extraordinary session of the National Assembly in Phnom Penh on 30 April 1989 was a clause re-establishing Buddhism as the state religion. Article Six of Part I declares: 'Buddhism is the religion of the state. Religious activities which conform to the constitution [are permitted]. Activities which use religion to infringe upon security, public order and the people's interests are prohibited.' Other changes to the constitution included the readoption of the name Cambodia for the country and the re-establishment of a market economy. These constitutional amendments were made just before the resumption of negotiations on the country's future, this time in Paris.

In the past year the Cambodian government has been displaying a new attitude to the practice of Buddhism, the majority religion among the country's population. Since July 1988 Buddhist prayers

have been broadcast over state radio. In January 1989, in what appeared to be an improvised speech, the prime minister Hun Sen apologised for mistakes his regime had made in its treatment of religious believers. Speaking to about 200 monks and old people at the Chum Kriel Pagoda in a suburb of Kampot City, he said that these mistakes had led people to believe that his government was hostile to religion. 'It was also used by our enemies,' he said, in a significant reference to the guerrilla factions fighting his Vietnamese-backed government. 'I can assure you,' he told the group, 'that the party and the government respect Buddhism.' Government leaders have even worshipped in public on occasion.

The danger to the government's existence presented by the Khmer Rouge resistance seems to have led to this change of attitude. The government needs all the support it can get and does not want Buddhists to support the resistance. Hun Sen's