

News in Brief

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

State Security Service's Tactics

Kathpress reports that instead of imprisonments, which are criticized abroad (even by western communist parties), priests and laymen are being intimidated by more frequent judicial inquiries. Sometimes the interrogations are carried out so rigorously that a number of those involved have had to go to hospital afterwards. Bishop Gabris had a heart attack after pressure had been put on him by the authorities following his visit to Rome, where he made statements about the difficulties faced by the Church in Czechoslovakia. His is not an isolated case. Other recent cases are as follows:

The Father Superior of the Franciscans in Bohemia, Fr Ales Zlamal, underwent a lengthy and rigorous hearing. He, too, suffered a heart attack as a result. Fr Barto, secretary of the Association of Religious Orders in the Dubcek era, was also given a hearing in Prague which lasted several hours, although he informed the authorities that he had already had two heart attacks. At this inquiry the authorities wanted to know how the "Memorandum of the Association of Religious Orders" addressed to President Husak had come into existence and how it had been distributed. Mother Superior Emma Kovarova, was also interrogated on the same issue, although this "Memorandum" was a lawful petition asking for the restoration of their legal rights.

Mgr Viktor Trstensky was interrogated for five hours in Dolny Kubin. Mgr Trstensky had complained to the Presi-

dent several times about having had his priest's licence withdrawn. *Kathpress* documented his case carefully. He was questioned in particular about how the documentary material about his case had reached the West. In Spisska Nova Ves in N. Slovakia, a retired university lecturer, Karel Becicar, underwent a rigorous investigation on account of his "religious activities". As a result he had a nervous breakdown and had to go into a psychiatric hospital. Other laymen, have been interrogated to see if they listen to Radio Vatican and if they correspond with the Vatican.

In Dedinsky a group of students were camping; the police suspected that they were carrying out spiritual exercises. On 10 August 1977 uniformed police surrounded the tents, took the nine students and interrogated them separately in the local school. Amid threats that they would have to give up their studies, they were called on to "admit" that there was a secretly-consecrated priest among them and that they had held devotions. The interrogations were carried on later in Pressburg, and in the last four months there have been still more inquiries. Finally one of the students could not stand the pressure and attempted suicide. (*Kathpress*, 19 January 1978)

Bishop Criticizes Religious Education

Bishop Julius Gabris was attacked by the Czechoslovak authorities for his outspoken criticism of religious education in Czechoslovakia at the Fourth Synod of Bishops held in Rome in October 1977. Bishop Gabris protested against the state schools' monopoly of religious education. The Church, he said, was not al-

lowed to undertake any religious education. His criticism was denounced by the Head of Religious Affairs in Czechoslovakia, Karel Hruza, and the clergy from Trnava diocese were encouraged to write to the authorities rejecting Bishop Gabris as a possible future Archbishop of Trnava. Bishop Gabris suffered a mild heart attack as a result of the pressures imposed upon him since October. He has not, however, succumbed to the pressure. (*Novy Zivot*, No. 3, March 1978, p. 7)

Vatican Diplomat Visits Prague

In the second half of April a prominent Vatican diplomat, Archbishop Luigi Poggi, visited Czechoslovakia. On his agenda were talks with Karel Hruza, head of the Office for Church Affairs attached to the Presidium of the federal government, and consultations with the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek. According to reports from Vatican circles, Archbishop Poggi's talks with the Czechoslovak government were to open a new round of discussion about relations between the regime and the Roman Catholic Church.

The reopening of negotiations after a seven month interval, indicates that the Czechoslovak government may have adopted a more constructive approach to the problem; previous interruptions lasted a year or longer. The result of the previous round of talks between the Vatican and representatives of the Czechoslovak government was the appointment of Cardinal Tomasek as Archbishop of Prague, the setting up of an independent Slovak Church province, and the adjustment of the boundaries of the dioceses in Slovakia and Moravia to the state frontiers. (*Radio Free Europe, Czechoslovak Situation Report* 14, 25 April 1978)

Czech Brethren to Print Hymnbook

The Evangelical Church of, Czech Brethren has been authorized by the government to print 80,000 copies of a new hymnbook. In addition to 150 psalms, the book contains more than 400 hymns. A version for organists and choirs is being prepared and will have a print-run of 2,000. For a number of years a special committee has been

selecting texts and melodies which will communicate the gospel in a modern way. The cost of the operation is estimated at US \$250,000. According to recent estimates the Church of the Czech Brethren has some 270,000 members in 220 churches and around 300 other places of worship. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, No. 12, 27 April 1978)

ROMANIA

Metropolitan Appointed

The Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church has elected Auxiliary Bishop Nestor Vornicescu Metropolitan of Oltenia and the Archbishop of Craiova. The new Romanian prelate, elected on 20 April, succeeds Metropolitan Teoctist who was named as Metropolitan of Moldova and Suceava last year. A man of letters, Metropolitan Nestor has published several works on Romanian culture. He is also a specialist in Church history. He is 51 years of age. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 27 April 1978)

Uniates Form New Committee

A new committee for the restoration of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church of Blaj has been formed in Bucharest. In an appeal dated August 1977 this committee asked the President of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu, to cancel the abolition of the Uniate Church in 1948. The Uniates were officially reintegrated with the Orthodox on 1 December 1948. The committee affirms in its letter that it does not wish to set itself against either the regime or the Orthodox Church, but wishes to bear witness to the "ecumenical spirit" and prepare for mutual discussions with the Orthodox. The letter points out that the action against the Greek Catholic Church was the result of pressure from Moscow. Now that the principle of non-interference in the affairs of other States has been accepted, President Ceausescu should take the necessary steps to eliminate the consequences of Soviet post-war interference in the religious sphere, as it has done in other spheres. The forcible unification in 1948, states the committee, was part of a secret conspiracy against Romania; and the question of the oppressed Greek Catholic Church must be a part of

Ceausescu's task of championing the ideals of national freedom and independence. *Kathpress* points out that the Vatican delegation to the Belgrade conference had already raised this question and that of the Greek Catholic Church in the Soviet Union. (AKSA, 24 February 1978)

Orthodox Priest Demands Church

An Orthodox priest, Costica Maftai, has written to the West for support in obtaining a visa to emigrate from Romania because of the impossible conditions imposed upon him and other clergy in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Maftai was brought from a rural parish to settle in the Bucharest parish of Titan, a newly-developed area on the outskirts of the city. Titan is one of many developing urban complexes in Romania, and Maftai's problem may become a test case for fellow priests in such areas. In spite of having 300,000 people in his parish, Maftai cannot obtain permission for a new church to be built. He carries on his ministry from his flat. When he raised the problem at the local refresher-course for Orthodox priests, he was attacked by the Church Inspector. In a letter supporting Maftai's fight for a church, his parishioners plead with him not to emigrate but to continue the fight for a legitimate cause inside Romania. They see in Maftai what they call a priest of the new generation. They cite the case of Fr Stefan Gavriila, who was dismissed from his post as a priest but was reinstated after several interventions. Meanwhile the number of ordinations in the Romanian Orthodox Church remains high. Over 400 new priests were ordained in 1976 and a similar figure was achieved for 1977.

Bishop Nicolae Dismissed

Bishop Vasile Nicolae, Episcopal Vicar of the diocese of Buzau, has been dismissed from office according to Presidential Decree 309 of 21 December 1977. Reasons for the dismissal are not known. (*Bire*, 16 January 1978)

Patriarch Justin Visits Ecumenical Patriarch

Patriarch Justin of the Romanian Orthodox Church paid his first official visit abroad since becoming Patriarch when

he visited the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios in Istanbul on 14-17 April. (*Service Orthodoxe Presse*, May 1978)

BULGARIA

Russian Patriarch Visits Bulgaria

A delegation of Russian Orthodox clergy, headed by Patriarch Pimen, visited Bulgaria from 26 October to 1 November 1977 to take part in celebrations marking the centenary of the Russo-Turkish War which liberated Bulgaria from the Ottoman yoke. The delegation first went to Plevan where they were met by Bulgarian Patriarch Maxim and took part in a memorial service. The following day they attended another service at the Shipka Memorial Church before going on to the Kuzanluk convent. On 28 October they visited another convent at Sopot before going on to Sofia where they attended a reception at the Soviet Embassy. The same evening the two patriarchs were received by Bulgarian Party leader Todor Zhivkov. On 31 October the delegation was given an official luncheon by Ivan Mikhailov, member of the State Council. (*Narodna Mladezh*, 27 October 1977, *Otechestven Front*, 27 October 1977 and 1 November 1977, *Rabotnichesko Delo*, 29 October 1977, *Tsurkoven Vestnik*, 1 December 1977)

Public Concern for Monasteries

In response to a reader's letter, an article has appeared in the *Young Communist* daily, which expresses concern for the state of many monasteries, especially in the Sofia and Pernik regions. These are suffering from neglect or being used for other purposes. The article stresses that monasteries are an important part of Bulgaria's cultural heritage, since in the past they were seats of learning and bulwarks of Bulgarian nationalism.

Among the casualties mentioned are: the Kurilski monastery, founded in the 10th century, which contains interesting portraits of its 15th century benefactors and which has lost its identity after being appropriated by the local psychiatric hospital; the Iskretski monastery, thought to date from the early 13th century, which has been taken over by a sanatorium for chest complaints;

the Podgumerski monastery, turned into an asylum.

Two other monasteries – the Shishmanovski near Samokov and the Ss. Peter and Paul monastery near Urvich, Sofia district, have been irretrievably lost as cultural monuments because of "building requirements". The article asks whether the same fate awaits the Seslavski monastery (Sofia district), the subject of the reader's letter. In issue No. 100 of the *State Gazette*, 1966, the monastery was declared a cultural monument. At present it is in a deplorable state, with broken doors and windows, its floor dug up by treasure hunters and its frescoes at the mercy of the elements. Some of the buildings are used as pigsties. Restoration, envisaged for 1978, is still in the planning stage and will proceed only if sufficient funds are available. (*Narodna Mladezh*, 27 July 1977)

Conference of European Churches in Sofia

The Conference of European Churches held a seminar in Sofia from 3 to 8 October 1977. The theme was "Rediscovering the commonwealth of the Churches". The seminar was attended by delegates and observers from 40 European churches from 18 countries, plus two participants from the USA. Observers were sent from non-Orthodox denominations in Bulgaria – Roman Catholic, Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal. (*Tsurkoven Vestnik*, 11 November 1977)

POLAND

Billy Graham Invited to Poland

The Polish government has given approval for the Baptist Union of Poland to invite evangelist Billy Graham to come for a series of religious meetings. Dates, length of stay and itinerary will be arranged by church representatives. Polish Baptists have worked with other Christian groups for almost 20 years to arrange such a visit. Mr T. Dusik, Vice-Minister for non-Catholic groups in the State Council for Religious Affairs, said, "We are happy to announce that Billy Graham can come to Poland".

It is expected that Dr Graham will accept the invitation sent by the Baptists, and they hope the visit will take place this coming September. Dr Walter M. Smyth, Director of International Ministries for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, had already said that the evangelist "would clear his calendar of other engagements" should an official invitation be extended. This will be Dr Graham's second official visit to a socialist republic in Eastern Europe. Last September, on the invitation of the Free Church Council, he and a team of co-workers spent one week in Hungary. The American Baptist evangelist also held public meetings in Yugoslavia in 1967. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 78:55, 23 February 1978)

In a more recent report *EBPS* states that Dr Billy Graham will be visiting Poland at the invitation of the Polish Baptist Union on 6-16 October. His itinerary will probably include the cities of Warsaw, Poznan, Wroclaw, Krakow, Bialystok and Cieszyn. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 29 May 1978)

Bishop against Conscription of Seminarists

The Polish Bishop of Wloclawek, Jan Zareba, has protested against the conscription of students in his diocese. The German edition of *Osservatore Romano*, 10 February 1978, reports that Bishop Zareba referred to an agreement between the government and the Polish bishops which exempts seminarists from military service. (*Informationsdienst*, G2W, No. 3, 18 February 1978, p. 2)

SOVIET UNION

Collection of Patriarch Pimen's Works Published

A 455-page collection of the speeches, messages, sermons and addresses by Patriarch Pimen has been published by the Moscow Patriarchate in a jubilee edition dedicated not only to the fifth anniversary of the 1971 *Sobor* of the Russian Orthodox Church and the enthronement of Patriarch Pimen, but also to the 20th anniversary of his consecration as bishop. The comprehensive collection covers all aspects of church life, the activities of the Russian Ortho-

dox Church as a whole and specifically Patriarch Pimen's involvement in them. The book is divided thematically into 13 sections, including "The 1971 Local Sobor of the Russian Orthodox Church at the St. Sergius-Holy Trinity Lavra", "Sermons", "The Russian Orthodox Church and Ecumenism", and "The Participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Defence of Peace". The book contains 30 photographs which illustrate the various stages of his life, has a white binding with gold printing and a green cover.

Archbishop Yermogen

The Russian Orthodox hierarch Archbishop Yermogen (Golubev) died on 7 April 1978 at the age of 83. He spent his last years at the Monastery of the Dormition in Zhirovitsy after his forced retirement in 1965 for demanding that the decisions of the 1961 Synod of Bishops be rescinded because they were uncanonical. Fr Gleb Yakunin said of him, "He does not have a single closed church on his conscience." (*Keston News Service*, No. 52, 25 May 1978)

Peter Vins Sentenced

Peter Vins was sentenced to one year of imprisonment in labour camp at his trial on 6 April in Kiev. Arrested and detained for 30 days in December and January on alleged "hooliganism" and "refusal to work" charges, Peter was released on 8 January. He was re-arrested on 16 February in Kiev and charged with "parasitism". His trial, originally scheduled for 28 March, was postponed because the President of the Court "could not attend". The circumstances leading to Peter's second arrest were doubtless connected with his continued activity with the Helsinki Monitors. (*Keston News Service*; Nos. 49, 50, 51; 2 March 1978, 30 March 1978, 21 April 1978)

All-Union Council's Report

The 1977 report of the AUCECB (All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists) noted progress in church construction. Many congregations in the Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Byelorussian republics had remodelled existing structures or built new buildings (prayer houses). Among those specifically mentioned were Pentecostal churches in

Brest, Novovolynsk and Minsk which have built new prayer houses. Both Pentecostal and Baptist congregations in Chernovtsy were allotted buildings which have now been reconstructed. The Baptist church in Kiev's Darnitsa quarter also completed a reconstruction project. New congregations of Mennonites, Pentecostals and Evangelical Christians and Baptists were reported in several areas of the RSFSR, Ukraine and Byelorussia.

The AUCECB also reported the election of four new regional superintendents. They are the Rev J. Tervits in the Latvian Republic, the Rev I. Bukaty in the Byelorussian Republic, and the Revs F. Starukhin and B. Sypko in the Kharkov and Omsk areas respectively. (*European Baptist Press Service* 78:18, 18 January 1978)

Baptist Periodical Increases Circulation

Bratsky Vestnik (*Brotherly Messenger*), the publication of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR, increased its circulation from 7,000 to 10,000 copies per issue as from January 1978. It appears every two months, usually in an 80-page edition. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 20 February 1978)

Printing Press Operators Sentenced

The trial of the four printing workers of "The Christian" Baptist press, arrested in March 1977, is described in a *samizdat* document. I. I. Leven, who had been sought by the police since 1974 for heading an unregistered church in Omsk region, was sentenced to five years detention; Lyudmila Zaitseva was sentenced to four years; D. I. Koop, the owner of the house where the press had operated, and Larisa Zaitseva were each sentenced to three years and six months. The prosecution alleged that they were guilty under three separate articles of the Criminal Code; Leven was also charged under a fourth article. Their defence lawyers agreed that they were guilty under Art. 162, "conducting an illegal enterprise", but not under Art. 190-1, "circulating knowingly false fabrications slandering the Soviet system", or under Art. 227, "infringement of the person and rights of citizens under the guise of conducting religious rites", both of

which are considered political offences. The court accepted the prosecution's case and also imposed the sentences called for by the prosecution. The expert witness called to examine the press, testified that the machinery was entirely home-made and worked on a modern offset technique. In fact, for a machine of its size it was unique: it could not only be completely dismantled and was thus portable, but it could also print simultaneously on both sides of the paper, which no comparable Soviet-produced printing press could do. (Trial: 22-25 Nov. 1977)

Christian Committee's Reports

The Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR (CCDBR) reported recent instances of violations against believers' rights in a document dated 8 February 1978. First, M. M. Yurkiv, a Pentecostal, was arrested on 23 December 1977 after applying for permission to emigrate from the USSR for religious reasons. He was charged with "misappropriation of state funds". Second, three Pentecostals (Perchatkin, Chuprin and Stepanov) were forcibly expelled from Moscow in January 1978 after receiving an official invitation from the American Embassy to come and present amendments to their official invitation for permanent residence in the USA.

The two incidents came in the wake of a press statement, issued on 21 September 1977 by the CCDBR, appealing for support for Soviet Pentecostals who want to emigrate as a result of the cruel attitude of the Soviet authorities. Official pronouncements, chiefly Art. 25 (on communist education) of the new Constitution, cause Pentecostals to fear for the fate of their children and their religious education. The press statement was also signed by Tatyana Khodorovich and Kronid Lyubarsky, members of the Russian Social Fund to Aid Political Prisoners in the USSR, and Tatyana Velikanova, member of the Action Group for the Defence of Human Rights.

Deprivation of parental rights against the Khailo parents (Baptists) is the third instance of violation of believers' rights. The case was to have been held on 3 February 1978. This case is alarming because it may signal a change in the

attitude of the Soviet authorities: during 1977 there were no known cases of deprivation of parental rights for religious reasons, and sentences previously passed have not been carried out.

Emigration Figures

In January 1978 there were 3,655 émigrés registered in Friedland — 1,182 less than in December 1977. Of these 2,659 came from Poland, 876 from the Soviet Union and 84 from other areas. The number of Poles was greatly reduced. In January 1978 there were 1,195 less Germans than in December 1977. The number of émigrés from the Soviet Union had increased, as well as that from other areas. In January this year six more people came from the other areas than in December of last year.

In 1977 permission to emigrate was given to 9,235 Germans as compared with 9,626 in 1976. In 1977 most resettlers came from Kirgizia (2,000) and from Kazakhstan (1,600). From Estonia came 1,300 Germans, and others came from the Moldavian Republic, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. (*Ostkirchliche Information*, 1978, II/8 & 9)

Lutheran Pastor Visits Soviet Union

The European Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Pastor Paul Hansen, reporting on his visit to the Soviet Union stated that the Council for Religious Affairs agreed that the LWF could send 500 German Bibles to congregations in the Soviet Union and that the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists could expect to import 10,000 German hymn books. Congregations which will be registered in a few months are at Leninabad in Tadzhikistan and Kant near Frunze. Hansen was impressed by the spiritual life of the churches he visited and by the gratitude for the improved situation. (*Informationsdienst*, G2W, No. 1, January 1978).

Baptists in Northcaucasian Town

The officially registered Baptist congregation of Grozny has more than 500 members. In 1977 twenty joined by baptism. The church has recently acquired a building which will be converted into a prayer-house. (*Informationsdienst*, G2W, No. 1-2, 8 February 1978, p. 8)