

are employees of the Church and are authorized by it to carry out their mission. The situation will be better served if the clergy are permitted to do their job without the gross interference of the state organs which often, without grounds, refuse them permission to carry out their ecclesiastical duties. As the labour legislation of 1949, which is still in force, is wholly inadequate, it is necessary to implement, particularly as regards clerical and church practice, the official Labour Law. In para. 268 such application is in fact specifically stipulated.

One must be wary also of unwarranted interference in the way entrance examinations to the theological colleges are conducted. The needs of the believers, and the interest and personal merit of the applicant should be the only criteria.

This document is introduced by a quotation from an outstanding figure in

cultural and intellectual history. His spirit is a living testimony to the fact that all these freedoms constitute an integral part of our historical heritage and that their importance in the life of every individual, as well as the whole of society, is crucial. It would be tragic if inalienable freedoms and human rights were to be regarded as something that could be expediently subordinated to political or ideological aims. We continue to hope and believe that our social system has the capacity to ensure that these human rights and freedoms are not only recognized, but also realized through popular initiative, in a spirit of mutual trust and cooperation.

Prof. Dr. Jirí Hájek, Dr. Sc.
Spokesman for Charter 77

Prague,
22 April 1977

(Translation and © Plastic People
Defence Fund, London, 1977)

Czech Clergy and Charter 77

Charter 77 was signed by a number of clergy, who also wrote an open letter last January entitled "Our Attitude to the Statements of Charter 77". The text of this open letter is printed below. In it the signatories explain why they signed the Charter.

Wherever man is freeing himself from oppression, exploitation, from social and spiritual destitution, from the slavery of fear and superstition, wherever dams are being built against human pride and the perverse lust of the double-dealing human heart, wherever the humiliated are raised up, there we can see the reflection of God's redeeming might, which overcomes the powers of nothingness and sin and delivers us from them.

Charter 77 is derived from important documents (the UN Charter, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and from both the well-known covenants, which have come into legal force in our country. We are convinced that

the *Charter* is a well-thought out criticism of injustices committed against the powerless and a response to the lamentations of the sorrowing, the afflicted and the oppressed (Exodus 3). *Charter 77* is imbued with a spirit of solidarity with the oppressed and with a determination to rectify injustice.

The question of human rights and their formulation in the above-mentioned documents has grown from spiritual roots which go back to the Reformation and the non-conformist movement in the Anglo-Saxon world. These subjects are very close to us, together with the emphasis of our Reformation on the free preaching of God's Word and the idea of religious tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others:

We believe that, in part, this is even a revival of the prophetic struggle against evil. Positive notes resound in the *Charter*: its aim is to improve society; it calls for a dialogue with the political powers even at the cost of lack of understanding, risks and sacrifices.

One of the spokesmen for *Charter 77*, Prof. Dr. Jan Patočka, expressed the idea that above the conscience of individuals and above the world of politics there exists a supreme moral and spiritual authority. We understand this in the light of Jesus Christ's witness before the representatives of political power (the conversation with Pontius Pilate) and we emphasize the supremacy of truth over ourselves.

In both past and present, Christians have left political power to its own devices and have not reminded it of the supra-political claims enjoined upon it. We failed to point out to the authorities their mission to serve and the limits of their competence. We have replaced critical responsibility with conformity.

Even though *Charter 77* does not speak about God or God's kingdom, it is fighting for freedom in religious matters, and in this it serves God's purposes. It calls attention to acute problems in our society and sees them in all their breadth and urgency. In this we glimpse the future universality of Christ's kingdom, to which countless people of all generations of the earth shall belong.

We do not see anything exceptional in the fact that we signed *Charter 77*. We believe that it is as much an expression of service to our fellow men as are such activities as responsible Bible work, free preaching, persuasive prayer or help given to the needy both in the fellowship and outside it through the unburdening of oneself in conversation. We rejoice that in the darkness of the present time, we see around us the work of Christ's Spirit.

We would like to assure you that in these days we are thinking deeply about the local church. We believe that Christians in our country and all over the world will support our efforts by prayer and action.

Signed :

MILAN BALABÁN,
ALFRÉD KOČÁB,
MILOŠ REJCHRT,
SVATOPLUK KARÁSEK,
ALEŠ BREZINA,
JAN ŠIMSA,
JAKUB TROJAN

Prague, January 1977

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Churches Under Pressure

The following letter was written by a Czech citizen (the author must remain anonymous) and is dated 24 March 1977. It reveals that pressure has been put on the Protestant and Catholic Churches to publish statements attacking the Charter 77 movement.

As a Czech citizen, now living in Britain, and as a member of one of the Churches in Czechoslovakia, I feel that I must write to share my grave disquiet over recent happenings in the Christian Churches there.

During the last few weeks the Protestant and Catholic Churches have had pressure put on them to publish statements against the *Charter 77* movement. Some of the Churches were forced to re-write their statements several times before these were accepted by the authori-

ties. Some of these statements have maintained a strong Christian witness in their tone, while others have sadly compromised.

Some clergy defend their capitulation by pointing out that they were threatened with having their churches closed if they failed to comply. "We have enough freedom if we use it wisely," they say, "and whatever our personal views on the *Charter*, we have a responsibility to keep the churches open for the souls entrusted to our care."

To people nurtured in the freedom of the West, this double-think may be hard to comprehend, but the Czech people have been trampled upon and forced to live out lies in their secular lives for so long, that some find it hard to distinguish truth from falsehood.