

sures that the reply will not be – nor indeed could it be – either an official reply or a broadly-based popular reaction. It will have to be a dialogue between the élites. This is all the more reason for it to aim at intellectual substance and moral integrity. I would like to make one suggestion to which I attach great importance. Michnik's motto in assessing the activities of the secular Left during the period of the Polish People's Republic is this: "We have sinned". In an extremely generous spirit, but without making excuses for her, he

says to the Church: "Ask yourselves whether you too have not sometimes made mistakes and had your weaknesses". This attitude is very appropriate. There can be no real dialogue unless both sides realize that even now, when we want to speak and act in good faith, we are not entirely innocent. Self-canonization and scrupulosity in assessing each other's faults and failures would invalidate any dialogue, however promising it might seem at first.

FR JACEK SALIJ, OP

## Lenin Attacks the Church

*The following secret letter from Lenin, dated 19 March 1922, was excluded from Lenin's Complete Works and only published in two Russian émigré publications in 1970–71, in Vestnik RSKhD No. 98 (1970) and then in Russkaya Mysl No. 2836, 1 April 1971.*

*After the Civil War of 1918–21, Russia faced famine and economic chaos. Patriarch Tikhon, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, appealed to all the churches to help the starving first in August and then in December 1921. On 2 January 1922 the VTsIK (All-Russian Central Executive Committee) issued a decree which authorized the confiscation of museum treasures and then on 16 February this decree was made to include all church valuables save those used for the Liturgy. In reaction to this Patriarch Tikhon publicly encouraged Orthodox parishes to hand over any valuable items which were not consecrated. However, on 23 February the VTsIK changed its policy and issued a decree demanding that all church valuables, i.e. including consecrated objects, be confiscated. The government knew that the Russian Orthodox Church would not accept such a demand, and from Lenin's secret letter it is clear that he intended to use the Church's resistance for his own ends. On 28 February Patriarch Tikhon forbade the handing over of consecrated objects, and when the Orthodox faithful refused to obey the authorities' demands their resistance was brutally suppressed. For example, in the town of Shuya, north-east of Moscow, on 15 March 1922, four people were killed, ten seriously wounded and*

*many arrested when the authorities came to confiscate the church's property. Fifty-four people, including a number of priests, were eventually tried. Eleven of the defendants were executed. In Russia as a whole Lenin's attack on the Church cost many lives: according to Nikita Struve "during 1922, 2,691 secular priests, 1,962 monks and 3,447 nuns were liquidated" (Christians in Contemporary Russia, Harvill Press, London 1967, p. 38).*

TOP SECRET

To Comrade Molotov,  
for Members of the Politburo

I request that under no circumstances a copy be made, and that each member of the Politburo (including Comrade Kalinin) make his comments on the document itself.

On the matter of the incident in Shuya, which has already been debated in the Politburo, I consider it vital to take a firm decision immediately about the overall policy for the struggle in this area. As I doubt that I shall manage to be personally present at the meeting of the Politburo on 20 March, I am therefore expressing my point of view in writing.

The Shuya incident must be considered in relation to the information which Rosta confidentially passed on recently to journalists: that members of the Black Hundreds\* [i.e. "reactionary" clergy and laity. Ed.] in Petrograd

\* The Black Hundreds was the name given to a reactionary organization

are preparing to resist the decree on the confiscation of church valuables. If one compares this fact with what the papers say about the clergy's attitude to the decree, and also with what we know of the illegal appeal of Patriarch Tikhon, then it is completely clear that the ultra-reactionary clergy [lit., Black Hundreds. *Ed.*] in league with their leader, are carrying out a well-thought-out plan of waging a decisive battle against us at this very time.

It is clear that this plan has been thought out and accepted sufficiently firmly at secret meetings of the most influential group of ultra-reactionary clergy. The events in Shuya are but one of the manifestations and applications of this general plan.

As I see it, our enemy is making a grave mistake here by attempting to draw us into a decisive battle at a time when such a battle is especially hopeless and disadvantageous for him. For us, on the contrary, this moment namely is not only exceptionally advantageous, but is in general the only moment when we can be 99-100 per cent sure of complete success in knocking out the enemy and securing for ourselves a position which is essential to us for many decades. Now and only now when in the famine-stricken areas people are eating people, when there are hundreds if not thousands of dead bodies lying by the roadside, can we (and therefore must we) carry out the confiscation of church valuables with stupendous and merciless energy, not stopping at repressing any sort of resistance. Now and only now the overwhelming majority of the peasant masses will be either for us, or, at all events, will not be in a position to support in any decisive way that handful of ultra-reactionary priests and bourgeois reactionaries who can and want to try out a policy of violent resistance to the Soviet decree.

Whatever happens, we must carry out the confiscation of church valuables in the quickest and most decisive manner. Thereby we can secure for ourselves a fund of a few hundred million gold

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which was set up in Russia after the liberalizing reforms of 1905 and which became known for its anti-Jewish pogroms. Lenin uses the term figuratively. *Ed.*

roubles (one must remember the gigantic riches of some monasteries). Without such a fund, any government work in general, any economic construction in particular, and especially any establishing of our position in Genoa is unthinkable. Whatever happens we must seize this fund of a few hundred million (or perhaps even a few billion) gold roubles. And this can only be done successfully now. All considerations indicate that later we would not succeed, for no other moment except that of desperate famine will give us such a mood amongst the peasant masses which will either gain us their sympathy, or at any rate will neutralize them in the sense that the victory in the struggle over confiscating the valuables will be undoubtedly and completely ours.

A clever writer on political matters rightly said that if, in order to achieve a known political goal, it is essential to use a series of harsh measures, then this must be done in the most energetic way and in the shortest time, because the masses will not endure such harsh measures if they last too long. This consideration is also supported particularly by the fact that as regards Russia's international position, we may find in all likelihood that after Genoa harsh measures against the reactionary clergy will be politically unwise and perhaps even too dangerous. At the moment the victory over the reactionary clergy is completely assured. Furthermore, most of our opponents abroad among Russian émigrés, i.e. the SRs and followers of Milyukov, will find it difficult to fight against us if, at this particular moment, namely at a time of famine, we carry out with maximum speed and ruthlessness our attack on the reactionary clergy.

Therefore I have come to the firm conclusion that at this very moment we must ruthlessly give battle against the reactionary clergy and overcome their resistance with a harshness which they will not forget for a few decades. I envisage the actual plan of campaign as follows:

Only comrade Kalinin should undertake officially any measures. Never and under no circumstances should comrade Trotsky come out publicly in the press or in any other way.

The telegram which has already been

sent in the name of the Politburo 'about the temporary halt on confiscating the valuables, should not be countermanded. It is to our advantage as it gives our enemy the impression that we are hesitating, that he has succeeded in frightening us (our enemy will of course soon learn about this secret telegram, for the very reason that it is secret).

One of the most energetic, intelligent and capable members of the VTsIK or other representatives of the central power should be sent to Shuya (one person would be better than a few). He should be given oral instructions by one member of the Politburo. The gist of these instructions should be that he arrest in Shuya as many representatives of the local clergy, the petty-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie as possible, no less than a few dozen, on suspicion of having participated directly or indirectly in forcibly resisting the VTsIK's decree on the confiscation of church valuables. After this work he must at once come to Moscow and personally give a report to a full meeting of the Politburo or before two members of the Politburo delegated for this task. On the basis of this report, the Politburo will issue a detailed decree to the judicial authorities, also orally, that the trials of the Shuya rebels, who have resisted helping the starving, be carried out with maximum speed, culminating in the shooting of a large number of the most influential and dangerous Black Hundreds in the town of Shuya, and if possible not only in this town but in Moscow and a few other spiritual centres.

I think it expedient not to touch Patriarch Tikhon himself, although he undoubtedly stands at the head of this revolt of slave-owners. In relation to him a secret directive should be given to the GPU [secret police] so that at this particular juncture all the contacts of this activist are observed and exposed as accurately and in as great detail as possible. Dzerzhinsky and Unschlicht are to

be instructed to make weekly reports personally to the Politburo.

At the Party Congress a secret conference on this should be held, to include all or nearly all delegates with the leading members of the GPU, NKYu (People's Commissariat of Justice) and the Revolutionary Tribunal. At this conference a secret decision of the congress should be taken to the effect that the confiscation of valuables, particularly those of the richest monasteries and churches, should be carried out with ruthless decisiveness stopping at nothing, and in as short a time as possible. The more representatives of the reactionary bourgeoisie and the reactionary clergy that we manage to shoot the better. Now is the time to teach the public such a lesson that for many decades they will not dare even to think of any sort of resistance.

So as to supervise the execution of these measures in the quickest and most successful way, a special commission must be appointed at the congress, i.e. at its secret conference. The participation of comrade Trotsky and comrade Kalinin is essential. This commission must not be publicized so that the subordination of all operations to it is ensured and is done not in the name of the commission, but according to all-soviet and all-Party procedure. The best and most reliable workers must be appointed to execute these measures in the richest monasteries and churches.

LENIN

I request that comrade Molotov try to send this letter round to all members of the Politburo this very evening (without making a copy) and to ask them to return it at once to the Secretary after reading it, with a brief note as to whether each member of the Politburo agrees with it or whether the letter provokes any disagreement.

LENIN

## Young Soviet Christians Form Seminar

*Alexander Ogorodnikov (27 years old), author with Boris Razveev of the following document, began organizing a seminar for people interested in exploring the Christian faith in September 1974.*

*In a letter to Dr Philip Potter, General Secretary of the WCC, dated 27 July 1976 (see RCL Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 45-7) Ogorodnikov described some of the harassment which he and his friends ex-*