

Editorial

It is impossible to tell what the political developments in Poland will be now that the government has agreed to recognize free trade unions, but whatever happens, the people of Poland have already won an extremely important victory. They have discovered that they are able to unite in the name of human rights and freedoms; and as the world realized when it saw the striking workers in the Gdansk shipyards kneeling in the mud to receive the sacrament, it is the Catholic faith which has provided Poles with the moral authority to make their united stand.

After the violent suppression of the Polish strikes of 1976, the workers began to understand that improvements in the quality of life promised by the Gierek government were unlikely to materialize. What is more, thinking people had long since stopped believing that Marxism as an ideology was capable in any form of inspiring social and political liberalization. The amount of unofficial literature in circulation—much of it of a religious orientation—began to grow rapidly. In this climate a Polish Pope was elected. Last year he visited his native land, and in their response to his visit the Polish faithful for the first time saw their true potential strength displayed. They put this strength to the test this summer. In this issue of *RCL* we are publishing some photographs of the Polish strikes, and an inspiring comment by Fr Stanisław Małkowski, one of the Catholic priests who went to the shipyards to minister to the religious needs of the workers.

In Eastern Europe, the country most comparable with Poland is the Soviet Republic of Lithuania: here too the vast majority of the population are Roman Catholics. In this issue of *RCL* (pp. 309-13) we are publishing a document describing the united resistance offered by a Lithuanian parish to attempts at interference by the local authorities in the affairs of the church.

The believers in Lithuania have their own *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* to communicate the facts of their persecution to their fellow-countrymen and to readers in the West. There

are however groups of believers in the Soviet Union—perhaps less numerous, perhaps more widely dispersed geographically—who have no such regular organ to publicize their cause. It was to provide a channel for all believers of any creed who wanted to publish protests about infringements of their rights that Fr Gleb Yakunin set up the “Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers’ Rights in the USSR” in 1976. In this issue of *RCL* (pp. 279-98) we are publishing an article and documents about the activities and fate of the Christian Committee and its members.

Fr Gleb Yakunin is an Orthodox priest, and all those who helped him found the Christian Committee were members of the Orthodox Church. In establishing the Christian Committee they set up a forum for co-operation amongst Christians of different denominations and amongst Christians and non-Christian believers in the Soviet Union. In this context, we may recall Fr Dimitri Dudko, who in his sermons inspired so many young people, whether Orthodox, non-Orthodox, Christian, non-Christian or atheist; and the “Christian Seminar on Problems of the Religious Renaissance” which welcomed non-Orthodox participants and which *inter alia* discussed questions of ecumenism and interdenominational co-operation not only within the USSR but between Christians of East and West. The members of the Christian Seminar defined one of their four aims as follows: “. . . dialogue with brethren of different faiths throughout the world in order to find a way out of the contemporary world-wide spiritual crisis.”

In a recent book, *The Russian New Right: Right-Wing Ideologies in the Contemporary USSR* (Berkeley, California, 1978), Alexander Yanov warns his readers of the danger of a resurgence of right-wing chauvinistic nationalism in the USSR now that Marxism-Leninism has ceased to inspire popular support. Yanov believes that since the mid-’60s most dissident movements based on the principles of Russian Orthodoxy have, albeit often unintentionally, given fuel to those very sentiments of Russian national superiority and exclusive historical destiny which certain sections of the ruling hierarchy are interested in fostering amongst the population at large. The examples of Fr Yakunin, Fr Dudko and the Christian Seminar remind us that whatever the truth in Yanov’s thesis it certainly does not present the whole of the picture. Russian Orthodox Christians have proved to be a powerful force inspiring reconciliation and co-operation amongst those of all creeds in the USSR who are suffering in their search for the truth; and they are also eager to share their spiritual experiences with us in the West. We shall be the richer if we accept their offering.