

Chronicle

Summaries of Events and Background Information

Religious Policy under Andropov and Chernenko

The death of Andropov and rapid selection of Chernenko as the new General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February this year gave rise to extensive speculation on the likely implications of the changeover. Any prognosis or comment, however, has to be restricted by the knowledge that the leadership will remain to a large extent collective. Under Chernenko this will probably prove to be the case to an even greater degree than it was under Andropov. Konstantin Chernenko, already showing signs of physical frailty in his public appearances, is unlikely to have the forcefulness to impose any significant changes. Andropov, who showed more inclination and potential for doing so, in the event had insufficient time to make any major impression on the Soviet system.

Despite the brevity of his Presidency, Andropov did without doubt make a notable impact on the lives of religious believers in the Soviet Union. The increase in repression of any attempts to extend religious life beyond the officially stipulated boundaries has been part of a general clamp-down on dissent which began with the pre-Olympic purges in 1979-80 when Andropov was head of the KGB. The number of known Christian prisoners rose to almost 400 in 1982; although it has since decreased to 323 this is still over twice the number of known cases in 1977.

For many years, Baptists have made up a large proportion of the imprisoned Christians. Under Andropov several Baptists were rearrested and given fresh sentences only months after completing a previous term of imprisonment. Two such cases were those of Pavel Rytikov and Galina Vil-

chinskaya. Each had been sentenced in August 1980 to three years for their activities in organising a summer camp for the children of Baptist prisoners. Rytikov was rearrested in April 1983 and charged with "parasitism"; he had been unable to find employment because his work-book had been kept by the court in L'viv and returned only after he had been sentenced to a further two years' strict regime camp. Galina Vilchinskaya was rearrested in November 1982, only three months after completing her sentence. She was detained at Vladivostok airport and in February 1983 was sentenced to two years' camp on charges of possessing drugs. Her Christian friends believe that the drugs were planted in her luggage at the airport. Another measure which, although it has been used against dissidents for some years, has only over the last two years been brought into force against Baptist prisoners, is that of re-sentencing in the camp before completion of the existing sentence. Four leading Baptist figures were given such additional sentences in 1983. Rudolf Klassen, a popular youth evangelist, and Yakov Skorniyakov, pastor-evangelist and member of the un-registered Baptists' national leadership (the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists), were arrested in the summer less than a month before they were due to be released and sentenced in September to three more years of camp. Alexei Kozorezov, also a pastor-evangelist and a national leadership figure — his wife Alexandra is president of the Council of Baptist Prisoners' Relatives — was arrested in December 1983 less than a week before the end of his sentence and is now awaiting

trial. Perhaps the most prominent of the four is Nikolai Baturin, who succeeded Georgi Vins as secretary of the CCECB. He was rearrested in September with more than a year of his sentence still to run, and given an additional three years' strict regime camp. Since his first arrest in 1948 Baturin has spent over 18 years in Soviet prisons and camps for his religious activities.

Such resentencing was made an even simpler legal practice when, following an edict from the USSR Supreme Soviet, certain changes were made in the RSFSR Criminal Code. These came into effect as from 1 October 1983, and corresponding changes can be expected to follow in the Criminal Codes of the other Soviet Republics.

A new article of the Criminal Code, No. 188-3, gives administrative authorities in labour camps a new sanction against those who show "malicious disobedience" and who have already been punished for breaches of camp discipline by a period in solitary confinement or prison. Such prisoners can now be punished by having a labour camp sentence extended by a period of up to three years. Especially dangerous recidivists, or those who have committed "especially dangerous State crimes", can be punished by an additional sentence of between one and five years. Into the latter category fall all those convicted under article 70 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda". The new law means that anyone who is involved in any kind of breach of camp discipline can now be kept in labour camp, in effect, indefinitely, and this will affect not only those people who take part in hunger-strikes and other forms of protest, but in theory anyone who infringes any aspect of camp discipline, down to such details as wearing an unbuttoned jacket. There has also been a change in Article 198-2 of the Criminal Code which deals with "malicious infringement of the rules of administrative surveillance". This "surveillance" refers to periods in which prisoners will be under "surveillance" after completion of their camp sentences. Until the latest change came into effect, attempts to escape from places of exile or to evade surveillance could be punished by six months to a year in detention, and then only after two previous warnings within a year. The new law makes provision for detention of between one and three years for a first offender. The first

Christian prisoner to be resentenced under the new law was a Russian Orthodox believer, Valeri Senderov. He had been sentenced only in February last year to the maximum term of seven years' imprisonment and five years' exile, on charges of "slandering the Soviet state and social system" which were based mainly on his work in documenting evidence of the discrimination against Jews in the entrance examinations to the Mathematics faculty of Moscow State University. The fact that his original offence was considered to be an "especially dangerous State crime" enabled the authorities to extend his sentence by a further five years. The pretext for this was probably the hunger strike which Senderov conducted in August 1983 in protest at the camp authorities' confiscation of his Bible, his prayer book and cross, a mathematical paper which he had completed while under investigation in Lefortovo Prison, and a letter to his mother.

Orthodox believers have also been suffering increasingly over the last two years from the attack on clandestine religious literature, although this attack has in the past been focussed mainly on the activities of the evangelical groups. Arrests have taken place of Orthodox believers for the writing and circulation of purely religious *samizdat*. Zoya Krakhmal'nikova was arrested in August 1982 for her editorship of a purely devotional journal, *Nadezhda* (Hope) (*RCL* Vol. 11 No. 1, p. 77, and Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 210-213). Viktor Burdyug was arrested in April 1982 for photocopying and circulating religious *samizdat*; and in March 1983 Father Alexander Pivovarov, the priest of the church in the Siberian town of Yeniseisk, was charged with distributing religious literature. Father Pivovarov was "known and respected for his exceptional preaching and deep faith, and not only in his native Tomsk. People came to see him from all the surrounding areas and he was popularly referred to as the 'Light of Siberia'."*

A specific offensive has been launched against the administration of the Russian Social Fund for aid to political prisoners and their families (established by Alexander Solzhenitsyn with the royalties from *Gulag Archipelago*). The work of administering the Fund was undertaken by Sergei Khodorovich; he was arrested in April 1983 and

* Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov, in *Keston News Service* No. 188, 1 Dec. 1983, p. 15.

reports have emerged of his being subjected to brutal punishment in Butyrki Prison. His successor, Andrei Kistyakovsky, was forced by ill-health to give up the work in October 1983 and the duties of Administrator were briefly taken over by art expert Boris Mikhailov. The Fund now has no publicly-declared Administrator.

Clearly the risks and problems associated with such work have become more acute over the last two years. This applies equally to the work of the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights, as was pointed out by a member of the Committee, Vadim Shcheglov, who was forced to emigrate last year. Since new members joined the Committee after the arrest of several founder-members their names have not been made public, in the hope that they may continue their work with the minimum hindrance. (*RCL* Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 332-334.) The Christian Committee's sister organisation in Lithuania, the Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights, has also suffered harsh repression during Andropov's presidency. (See pp. 202-3 of this issue of *RCL*.)

In an attempt to crush the protests on behalf of the illegal Uniate church, the leader of the Committee for the Defence of the Catholic Faith and Church, Iosif Terelya (who has already spent 18 years in prisons and camps), was arrested at the end of 1982 and sentenced to a year's strict regime camp on charges of "parasitism". During his imprisonment the duties as head of the Committee were taken over by Vasili Antonovich Kobrin.

Reports of the worsening plight of the Russian Orthodox monasteries have been reaching the West with increasing frequency over the last 18 months. The repressions and malpractices at the Pochayev Monastery have been a matter of concern for many years, but details about recent events there have reached Keston College in the form of appeals from a senior monk who was expelled from the monastery in 1981, Hegumen Apelli (Stankevich). Even more disturbing have been reports from the normally peaceful Monastery of the Caves at Pskov, on the border between Estonia and the RSFSR. A document which reached Keston College in 1983 described the demoralising effect of recent KGB manipulation and violence at the monas-

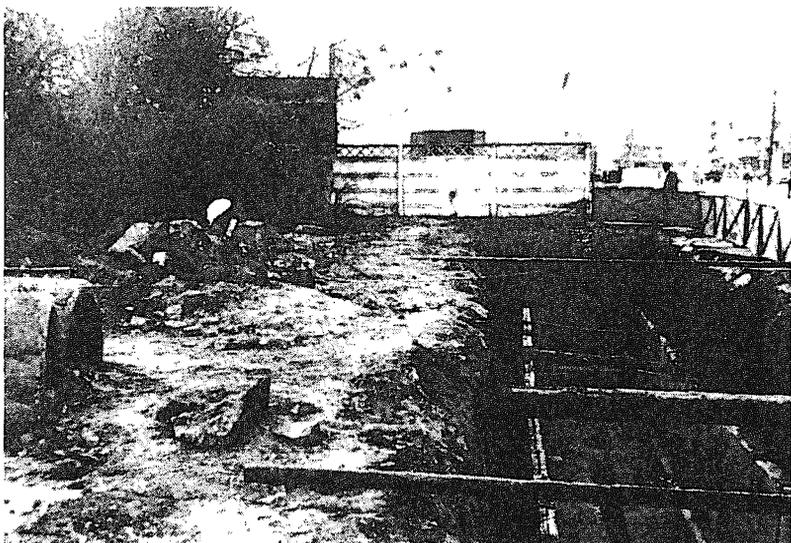
tery.* Rumours have also been circulating of increasing official pressures on the monks at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St Sergius at Zagorsk, near Moscow. Visitors to the USSR during the last year have had their requests to visit Zagorsk turned down although such visits have been possible in the past. However, according to an article in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (No. 7 1983, p. 8) there are currently "over 100" monks at Zagorsk. If this figure is correct it represents an increase from that of 80-90 monks reported in the late 1970s, but it is conceivable that the article is intended to counter the rumours of a deterioration in the situation at Zagorsk. The return of the Danilovsky monastery, near Moscow, to the Church (the monastery was seized by the authorities after the 1917 Revolution) was publicised in the Western press last year, but it is not certain whether there is to be a monastic community living there. A large proportion of the monastery buildings will no doubt be taken up by offices, since most of the departments of the Moscow Patriarchate (at present scattered around Moscow) are to be centred there. The closure of a Georgian Orthodox monastery in 1982 (*RCL* Vol. 11 No. 1, p. 73) highlighted a series of repressive measures taken against the religious festivals and services of the Georgian Orthodox Church which have given rise to renewed appeals from clergy and lay believers since 1980.

The departure of the "Siberian Seven" families from the USSR at the end of their 20-year struggle for exit visas attracted a great deal of publicity in the West. The general trend, however, has been a sharp decline in the number being allowed to emigrate. Few Pentecostals, out of the estimated 30,000 who would like to leave, have ever been allowed to do so, and recently harsh sentences have been imposed on the leaders of the Pentecostal emigration movement. Pavel Akhtyorov was sentenced to twelve years; Eduard Bulakh was resented, without being released from his previous one-year term, to a further 2½ years. The decline in emigration among the two major ethnic groups of would-be emigrants, Germans and Jews, reflects the cooling of East/West relations, which for the immediate future at least does not give grounds for optimism for those who have submitted applications for an exit visa. The number of Germans leaving the Soviet Union dropped from almost 10,000 in 1975

*See this issue of *RCL*, pp. 193-4.



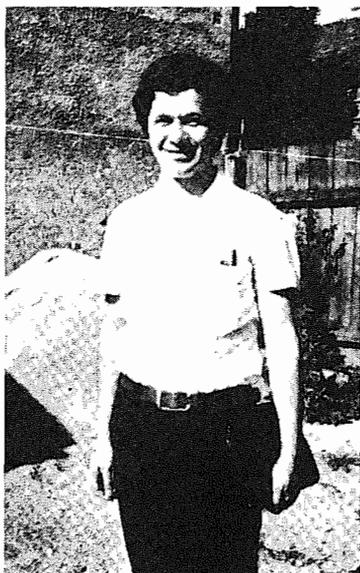
Left: the interior of the Mihai Bravu Baptist Church in Bucharest in 1982 with Pastor Vasile Talos at the microphone; *below:* the site of the church after its demolition on 12 September 1983. See Chronicle item on pp. 204-5 of this issue.



Left: Vasile Talos, pastor of the Mihai Bravu church, with his wife Cornelia. (All photos courtesy Romanian Aid Fund.)



Left: Members of the congregation gather outside the Oradea Baptist church in Romania (photo courtesy Keston College); *below left:* Dr Nicolae Gheorgița, co-pastor of the Oradea church, with his family; *below right:* his fellow-pastor Paul Negruț. (Photos courtesy Romanian Aid Fund.) See Chronicle item on pp. 204-5 of this issue.



Right: Medias Baptist Church, Romania. (Photo courtesy Romanian Aid Fund.)

to 2,000 in 1982. The number of Jews who have been allowed to emigrate has dropped dramatically over the last four years. After a high of 51,300 in 1979 it fell to 9,460 in 1981, to 2,692 in 1982. The 1983 figure was a mere 1,315. "Refuseniks" and activists have been subject to an extensive propaganda campaign in the name of "anti-Zionism", brought to public attention in the West last year by the protest against anti-semitism made by Russian Orthodox scholar Ivan Martynov. The Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public, set up during Andropov's time as Soviet leader, has been vociferous in condemnation of Israel and of "Zionist" influence from the West on Soviet Jews. The sentencing of several leading figures in Jewish culture, for example Yuri Tarnopolsky, and most notably Isosif Begun, sentenced to twelve years, was part of a severe attack on the emerging interest among Soviet Jews in their own history, culture and religion, which has been going on for the last two or three years.

Chernenko has on the "Jewish question", as on other issues, reiterated the usual official views, claiming in his speech at the June 1983 Central Committee Plenum that no such "question" exists in the USSR. As far as officially unacceptable religious activity is concerned, he has also repeated the attitude often put forward in propaganda. He stated in the same speech, "When we come across instances of violation of socialist laws and subversive political activity under the guise of religion, we act in accordance with the demands of our constitution", and went on to make the usual accusation of manipulation of believers by Western "ideological centres of imperialism".

He also stressed the need to combat "new tendencies and fads among young people and to impart to them a proper ideological orientation". Statements about religion at occasions such as the Plenum are rare, and it is particularly noteworthy that religion was openly acknowledged in Chernenko's speech as a definite influence in the lives of "not a very insignificant part" of the population. A Plenum speech should be regarded as a collective statement rather than a personal one, but in fact Chernenko has been unusual in making several public statements on religion. Besides the June speech, the other sources for these statements are a 1978 pamphlet entitled *Communists in the*

USSR, and a book *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Human Rights* published in 1982. In the latter he describes religion as "a tenacious survival of the past with deep social and epistemological roots". He goes on, "The vitality of religious delusions is stimulated by the activities of religious organisations, by the propaganda of religious-idealist ideology from abroad, and shortcomings in atheist work."

Chernenko clearly saw the combatting of religious influences as an important part of the ideological work for which he was responsible following the death of M. Suslov in 1982, but he appears deliberately to stress that the struggle is against religious ideology and not against believers themselves. The spread of atheism, he argues, will not come from prohibitions but rather as a result of "drawing believers into an active social life", and furthermore, "any violation of believers' feelings will only lead to the strengthening of religious fanaticism" (June 1983 Plenum speech). Although the emphasis Chernenko places upon the role of "socialist transformation and education" in the struggle against religious beliefs appears to characterise his views as relatively moderate, his statements are still awaiting practical application, and may do so indefinitely. It should also be borne in mind that since the 1978 and 1982 works both later appeared in English, and the Plenum speech is of course tailored for Western as well as Soviet hearers, their content is partly conditioned by the need to defend Soviet policy against its Western critics.

There can apparently be no major re-think of the basic attitude toward religion within the framework of "building communism". As Chernenko expressed it in his Plenum speech last year, "There are truths which are not subject to reexamination, problems which were solved finally, long ago. We cannot, if we wish to continue on the basis of science, 'forget' the fundamental principles of the materialistic dialectic." Nevertheless, for believers in the USSR, the replacement of Yuri Andropov's more forceful presidency by what must probably be a more collective leadership under Chernenko may give cause for a cautious hope for a levelling off of the recent sharp escalation of repression.