

Chronicle

Summary of Events and Background Information

Charter 77 on Religious Orders in Czechoslovakia

Charter 77, the human rights organisation in Czechoslovakia, has released a document describing the plight of religious orders. The document praises the historical role of monks and nuns, who, "through their selfless dedication to others" over 11 centuries have founded schools, libraries, hospitals and other charitable institutions, only to be hauled off to concentration camps on 13 April 1950, when the orders were disestablished by the communist authorities.

Out of 15,200 religious, over 12,000 were imprisoned, some on fabricated charges. The majority were kept in labour camps indefinitely. There were 393 monasteries in Czechoslovakia at the time. They were all sacked and looted and their valuable libraries were destroyed. Most of them, despite their historical value, have been used for industrial and farming purposes with devastating results for the buildings.

Throughout the 1960s, when the camps were being gradually phased out, those monastics who had survived were either forcibly retired and sent to special "old people's homes" set up for them, or allowed to work as civilians. Small groups of nuns survived in geriatric hospitals and homes for incurable invalids as no-one could be found to do their work. In spite of this suffering, and continuing pressure to give up their vocation, very few have actually done so. Although the religious had to give up their communal way of life, they still maintain contacts with one another and some of the orders have even been able to attract novices.

Since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslo-

vakia in 1968 they have come under constant pressure from the authorities: house searches, surveillance, interrogations, trials and imprisonment are their daily bread. Since 1981 the pressure has increased as the authorities fear religious revival. In that year alone two homes for forcibly retired nuns were raided by massive police forces, and in 1983 a swoop on all Franciscans in the country was ordered. Hundreds were interrogated and a few dozen imprisoned, only to be released later after a worldwide protest. In November 1984 seven Franciscans were arrested in Liberec, of whom three are still in detention.

Unlike Poland, where the religious orders have remained an integral part of the church, or Hungary and East Germany, where some orders are allowed to function, the Czechoslovak government's claim that "religious vocation is compatible with the law as long as it remains a private affair" is a way of fudging the issue of religious liberty. In practice it means that the monastics are not allowed to wear habits, to live communally or to maintain contacts within orders, not to mention the recruitment of new members. Even buying a house could constitute violation of article 178, "obstructing state supervision of the church".

The continuing existence of the orders is a paradox for the regime. Thirty-five years after the dissolution of the monasteries there should be only a handful of ageing monks and nuns. In fact this is patently not so.

Barinov, Timokhin and "Trumpet Call"

Valeri Barinov is the leader of a Soviet Christian rock group, "Trumpet Call", and the composer of a Christian rock opera, also entitled "Trumpet Call", which was secretly recorded by the group in the USSR in 1983. The group, based in Leningrad, has seven members, of different denominational backgrounds, five of whom have chosen to remain anonymous. Two Baptist members, Valeri himself and Sergei Timokhin, bass guitarist, decided in December 1983 to appeal to the authorities for permission to give public performances of their music.* This marked the beginning of a campaign of intense harassment on the part of the authorities against the two men and their families, culminating in the arrest of Valeri and Sergei in March 1984.

Barinov (aged 40) is himself a talented but untrained musician. After his conversion to Christianity in his late twenties he was determined to use his musical ability as a vehicle for preaching the Gospel. His ability to perform Western songs originating from the famous groups of the sixties, such as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles, guaranteed him a captive audience. Young people flocked to listen to his impromptu, entirely unofficial performances held in local youth clubs and on such occasions he always combined his music with preaching the Gospel. As a result he was harassed by the KGB and was dismissed from a succession of jobs for "open evangelism". After hearing the Western rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" in the mid-1970s he decided to write his own rock version of the Gospel, convinced that this would be a unique way of reaching thousands of Soviet young people who might otherwise never have an opportunity to hear an alternative to the uninspiring atheist propaganda with which they are confronted from their earliest schooldays. His desire to reach young people with the Christian message was so great that he decided not to confine himself to a Russian-speaking audience. He taught himself English so that later, when the recording was made, he was able to sing the songs in English, making them accessible to an English audience.

The rock opera "Trumpet Call" was com-

pleted by 1975, but it was only at the beginning of the 1980s that Barinov succeeded in finding Christian musicians of a professional standard to perform his music. Over the next two years the seven members of the group worked secretly towards the recording of their music, but the practical arrangements for meeting together for rehearsals, storing their equipment and finding a location for the recording had to be worked out with extreme caution, and it was difficult to get spare parts for the equipment and instruments. By this time Barinov and Timokhin were considered sufficiently "subversive" to be constantly tailed. The odds against them completing the project were enormous. Each member of the group had to record his part of the rock opera separately in a secret recording studio and even when this was completed it was almost nine months before the recording reached the West.

Barinov's commitment to helping "down-and-outs" — drug addicts, prostitutes and alcoholics — made him very unpopular with his own Baptist church leadership. They did not consider it seemly for a Christian to mix with the "dregs of society". They also strongly disapproved of his rock music. Finally the Church leadership caved in under pressure from the KGB and expelled Barinov from the Church in June 1983. However, he still received wide support from ordinary members of the congregation.

Psychiatric Detention

In April 1983 the authorities responded to the appeal written by Barinov and Timokhin asking for permission to perform their music in public by registering Barinov as a psychiatric patient, although neither Barinov nor his relatives were informed of the diagnosis of his "illness". This placed great pressure on his family since they knew that he could be detained at any time and held indefinitely without trial. This threat became a reality in October of the same year when he was forcibly confined in a Leningrad psychiatric hospital. The doctor in charge of his case told Mrs Barinov that although her husband was not mentally ill his views on religion differed so much from those of the average Soviet citizen that he needed psychiatric treatment. On this occasion Barinov was unexpectedly re-

*See RCL Vol. 12 No. 1, p. 93.

leased after only ten days' confinement, due to his case being raised in the western press and aired by western radio broadcasting to the USSR. Surveillance and harassment were stepped up, however, following his release. His two daughters Zhanna (15) and Marina (14) and his wife were tailed every time they left the flat, and sometimes there were as many as six militia or KGB vehicles parked outside. In November 1983 Barinov and Timokhin organised an evangelistic meeting which they hoped to hold in Leningrad Baptist church. A group of about two hundred young people turned up but were refused entry to the church by Baptist officials. About half this number finally found a place to congregate in a club house on a building site where Barinov was working temporarily as a night-watchman. After about an hour of lively discussion on biblical themes, led by Barinov and other Christians, the militia arrived and arrested all those present, including Barinov's daughter Zhanna. They were all held for questioning for several hours. Later Barinov was summoned to Zhanna's school and an explanation was demanded for his daughter's "unruly behaviour in disturbing the peace".

This relentless pressure on his family life and personal freedom, which had begun a number of years earlier but intensified in 1983, caused Barinov a number of times to think of trying to leave the Soviet Union. He has always hoped that he would have an opportunity to work in the West and to broaden his musical ministry to include a young western audience, and it was for this reason that he went to such lengths to record the "Trumpet Call" in English. He talked to many western friends about the possibility of an illegal escape attempt and it must be said that the majority of them strongly discouraged him. But he always regarded this as a last resort if it became impossible to continue his evangelistic work in his own country. In the various documents he has sent to the West he described how, on more than one occasion, God held him back from taking such a step. However, at the beginning of 1984 Barinov and Timokhin set off from Leningrad for the northern city of Murmansk, about 150 miles from the Soviet-Finnish border, with the intention of investigating the possibility of crossing into Finland. We have no details whatsoever of where they actually went, whether they even reached Murmansk, let alone proceeded any closer to the border. However, at some point

they both decided that it was not God's will for them to carry out their plan. They decided to return to Leningrad. At about 2 am, on 4 March when they were asleep at the railway station in Kandalaksha (an open city about one hundred miles east of the Finnish border and on the main line to Leningrad) they were arrested by two militiamen.

It is clear from subsequent information regarding the investigation and trial that the fact they had planned this course of action and made certain preparations towards that end was the pretext for putting them on trial. Barinov and Timokhin were sentenced to 2½ and 2 years' labour camp respectively under Article 16/83 of the RSFSR Criminal Code.

Hunger Strike

Following his arrest Barinov went on hunger strike as an act of protest and continued for 22 days. He and Timokhin spent a month in prison in Murmansk before being transferred to the KGB headquarters at Voinova Street in Leningrad. Their wives found out about the arrests at the beginning of April when militia men and KGB officers came to search their flats. Photographs, letters and other personal possessions were confiscated.

During the investigation Barinov was subjected to six psychiatric examinations and was held for one month in psychiatric hospital in Lebedeva Street. Despite this, he was certified as being in sound mental health. The trial eventually took place from 20 to 23 November 1984. Although it was supposed to be an open trial, many friends and relatives were turned away. When they arrived at the Leningrad City Court the men's wives and other close relatives were not told where the trial was being held. They managed to find the courtroom by following a television cable which led to a small room filled with KGB officials. The first two days of the trial were televised.

The authorities tried to prove that there had been a genuine escape attempt, but there was no evidence for this. Four men, all convicted criminals, who had shared cells with Barinov and Timokhin in Murmansk gave evidence. Three of them refused to testify against the accused, stating that there was nothing wrong with their characters. The fourth, a man convicted for attempting to murder his wife, stated that Barinov, while he was in prison, asked him for a map

of the border area. This was apparently *after* he had been arrested. Barinov responded to this by asking the man if he seriously expected people to believe that he would have asked for a map intended for use in two or three years time. This was one of a number of occasions when he interrupted the proceedings to query the statements made by the prosecutor or the witnesses. Eventually he was told to keep silent or he would be removed from the court. The two militia men who had arrested Barinov and Timokhin both said that, in their view, the men had done nothing wrong. Neighbours who were called into the witness stand similarly refused to testify against them. In fact they described them as "good blokes".

The Real "Crime"

During the course of the trial a great deal of time was devoted to exposing Barinov's alleged anti-Soviet activities. The official Tass report on the trial issued on 26 November indicates clearly that the real "crime" had nothing whatsoever to do with an attempted border crossing. "The causes which pushed Barinov and Timokhin to the commission of the crime were convincingly exposed during the court session. For several years they had maintained contacts with foreigners — representatives of anti-Soviet organisations abroad — . . . With the aid of emissaries of those organisations Barinov and Timokhin tried to smuggle slanderous information abroad on the position of believers in the USSR. They had concealed their anti-social activities under the signboard of an amateur musical ensemble — the so-called *Trubny Zov* (Trumpet Call) rock group . . ."

An article which appeared in the Leningrad newspaper, *Leningradskaya pravda*, on 27 November, gave further evidence of the "criminal" intentions of the two men. The article claimed that Barinov had never

really believed in Christianity but simply used it as a tool to gain his own ends: "Of course, he didn't really believe. He learnt how to use the name of the Almighty as a cover for anything. Any sin, any unseemly business." Barinov was accused of having formed the rock group simply to draw attention to himself and satisfy his self-conceit and craving for recognition. The official accounts of the trial fail to offer any conclusive evidence that there was a genuine escape attempt. They merely indicate that certain preparations had been made by the two men and this was the justification for passing the sentences. The author of the article in *Leningradskaya pravda* states: "Barinov remained true to himself. Both during the investigation and at the trial he twisted and turned and stubbornly maintained the story he had thought up: voluntary abandonment of the crime."

Sergei Timokhin was pressurised into making a formal "statement of repentance" during the trial. He admitted that he had done wrong by playing Christian music and preaching and stated that he would, in future, work for the common good. This "confession" was televised and will undoubtedly be put to good use by the Soviet authorities further to discredit Barinov and all that he stands for. Barinov announced during his defence speech that he was on trial for being a Christian and that he would continue his hunger strike which he began on the first day of the trial, until "justice is done". As a result of force-feeding he suffered a heart attack on 28 November. On the following day his wife, Tanya, was allowed to visit him for one hour. This was only the second time she had been permitted to see him since his arrest. Despite the heart attack he continued the hunger strike for forty days. He is serving his sentence in Komi ASSR.

LORNA BOURDEAUX

The Five Hundredth anniversary of St Casimir's death in Lithuania

The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church (CLCC) has reported in some detail on the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the death of St Casimir, the patron

saint of Lithuania. Three of the 1984 issues of the samizdat *Chronicle* (Nos 62, 63 and 64) include articles devoted to the jubilee and to attempts by the Soviet authorities to