

been portrayed as the villain of the piece and as instigators of pogroms against Armenians. The latter feel resentment that their rather naive claim — which, if it had been accepted, would surely have opened a floodgate to similar demands — was not simply accepted by Moscow. Though the issue is essentially national rather than religious, the

two cannot be easily separated. Indeed the Kremlin seems to have recognised this in using the opening of churches in Nagorno-Karabakh as one of the means of assuaging the Armenian population of the region. Whether this will be sufficient remains to be seen.

JOHN ANDERSON

## Refugees from Romania in Hungary

The social work of the churches of Hungary has taken on a new dimension in 1988 in response to the problems caused by the growing number of refugees from Romania seeking asylum in Hungary. According to official Hungarian sources 8,700 refugees from Romania were granted permission to remain in Hungary in 1987, and a further 4,200 in the first five months of this year. The government believes this may be only the tip of the iceberg. Though no precise figures are known, thousands more are thought not to have made contact with the authorities. The policy of the Hungarian government is not to repatriate the refugees. To do otherwise would offend public opinion in Hungary, which has been deeply moved by the plight of the asylum seekers.

The vast majority of the refugees are ethnic Hungarians from the region of Transylvania, which was absorbed into Romania after the dismemberment of the Hungarian state following the First World War. There are about two million Hungarians living in Romania, making them the largest national minority in Europe. About ten per cent of the refugees are ethnic Romanians. Two of the most frequently given reasons for leaving Romania are the

country's grinding poverty and the militantly anti-religious policies of the Ceausescu regime. Among the ethnic Hungarians, however, the anti-Hungarian policies of the Romanian authorities are the reason most often cited for emigrating.

The refugees bring many problems with them. They require food, housing and employment — commodities that the economically hard pressed Hungarian government cannot easily afford. Until the beginning of this year there were no government or church programmes designed to help the refugees. Some unofficial religious groups, however, have been providing assistance since the trickle of refugees became a flood last year. The Community of Reconciliation — an ecumenical group of young people headed by the Rev. Géza Németh — has been in the forefront of this unofficial activity. The Community had already gained a reputation for its social work amongst the wayward youth of Budapest. The group, in Németh's words, has also had a long-standing interest in the "persecuted Christians and national minorities in Romania". It organises the sending of food, Christian literature and medical supplies to needy brethren there. In the autumn of 1986 the Community circulated a petition,

which was signed by over 1,400 believers, calling on Hungary's church leaders to express sympathy with the Hungarians of Romania, and to establish a charity fund for their benefit.\*

The Community of Reconciliation's refugee work started in the summer of 1987 when small numbers of recent arrivals from Romania began to attend its meetings at the Reformed chapel on Csaba utca in Budapest. As the number of refugees seeking material help, counselling and fellowship increased Németh devoted more of his time to dealing with their problems, to the point where it became a full-time job. By January of this year 150 refugees were regularly attending the meetings of the Community. The Csaba utca chapel was too small to accommodate the influx of refugees in addition to the fifty or so young people who make up the core of the Community. The problem of overcrowding was solved later that month when Bishop Károly Tóth of the Reformed Church gave Németh permission to transfer his refugee work to the Rákosszentmihály district of Budapest, where the local Reformed congregation wished to open a refugee centre in its large premises. Six other Reformed clergymen now work alongside Németh in this enterprise.

As of April 1988 over four hundred were regularly worshipping at the special Friday evening services for refugees at Rákosszentmihály. Throughout the week the pastors and a team of lay volunteers distribute food, money and clothing at the church. Professional medical advice is also available. Some of the refugees show physical signs of torture. Altogether there are over 1,000

names of refugees on the Rákosszentmihály register. So far the mission has been able to prevent any of them from having to sleep on the streets. By mid-April the Rákosszentmihály refugee centre had received gifts of 1,012,393 forints from congregations and individuals, and had distributed 688,358 forints in on-the-spot aid.

While the social work of the Hungarian churches remains hampered by legal restrictions dating from the Stalinist era, the authorities have given approval for the churches to take up the refugee work officially. Since the foundation of the Rákosszentmihály centre the Reformed Church has established others in Debrecen and Miskolc. There are also Catholic and Lutheran refugee centres. The small Adventist Church is showing a special concern for the ethnic Romanian Adventists who have sought refuge in Hungary. This church activity is supervised by a government commission established in March to coordinate the refugee work of the various agencies involved — the churches, the Red Cross, local government, the police, the health service etc.

Some church leaders are of the view that the churches ought to take a stand against the injustices in Romania which they see as the root cause of the refugee problem. The churches first broke their long silence on the subject in response to the petition of the Community of Reconciliation mentioned above. More recently, at a meeting of the Commission on refugees on 16 April, the Catholic Bishop of Szeged, Endre Gyulay, urged the Hungarian government to enlist the help of the United Nations and its Soviet-bloc allies in persuading the Romanian authorities to respect the human rights of their Hungarian minority. But Hungarian church leaders recognise that there are limits to the extent to which they can voice the mounting indignation

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\*See John V. Eibner "The Hungarian Minority in Romania", RCL, Vol. 15 No. 2, p. 205.

of the faithful. On the one hand, they were reminded by the Hungarian Prime Minister Károly Grósz in mid-March that there are "strongly nationalistic" forces within Hungary which are trying to use the refugee problem to "disturb and overturn the social order". Such attitudes, he continued, were "harmful to the interests of Hungarians both in Hungary and abroad". These words were widely interpreted as a warning not to stray from the government's policy on the refugee question and the national rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania. On the other hand, pressure comes from Romania. In April 1987 Metropolitan Antonie of Transylvania responded to Hun-

garian charges of national discrimination in Romania by accusing his government's Hungarian critics of seeking "tension and destabilisation", and claimed that the national rights of the Romanians of Transylvania were violated under Hungarian rule. Likely to carry more weight with the church leaders of Hungary are the reports that the Hungarian Catholic Bishop of Alba Julia, Antal Jakab, has asked the Primate of Hungary, Archbishop László Paskai, not to make public statements on the issue of the Hungarian minority because of the added difficulties this brings to his church.

JOHN V. EIBNER

## Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

The 45th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 has been marked this year in a fashion which has no parallel in Polish history. For both political and economic considerations the Polish government has decided to use the anniversary to further its wider political aims. For both political and diplomatic reasons visiting Israeli ministers and Jewish leaders from the West decided to go along with these Polish efforts. They did not lay down the condition that public figures actively involved in the "anti-Zionist" campaign of 1968, which effectively put an end to the 1,000-year-long history of the Jews in Poland, should not play a major part at the commemorative events. Had such a condition been stipulated, the Polish government would have had no choice but to accept it.

In the event only a few independent spirits in Poland and in the West found it necessary to protest or to

remark at the sacrifice of good taste and historical truth for the sake of *Realpolitik*.

Some of the commemorative events, especially the visits to the death camps, were a searing emotional experience for the survivors of the Nazi holocaust and for people born after the Second World War. Other commemorative ceremonies had a pronounced official character.

The commemorative events started on 14 and 15 April with an international conference on "The Struggle and Martyrology of Jews and Poles during the Nazi Occupation", which took place in Warsaw. On the same day — 14 April — 1,000 young Jews from the West took part in a "March of the Living" at the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp complex. On 17 April the Medal of the Righteous Among Nations was presented by the Yad Va-Shem Institute to 97 Poles who saved the lives of Jews during the Nazi Holocaust.