

# News in Brief

## *Anti-religious Campaign Initiated in Mozambique*

A recent document outlining the guidelines of Frelimo's policy towards religion has been circulating in Mozambique. It states in part: "The masses will be protected against all pressure or any obligation to attend church service, of practising religion or organizing associations dependent upon any religious group . . . religion will be no more than an episode of the past, worthy of mention in the history of the world communist movement." Attention is concentrated on the Roman Catholic Church, the religion of Mozambique's colonisers, which is described as "a reactionary organization which gives rise to counter-revolutionary activities in peoples' democracies. So that peoples' democracies can proceed along the path of Socialism and Communism, it is necessary once and for all to put an end to the influence of this Church and the activities it pursues. When the political struggle and the forces of production reach a high level we can destroy it." Clergy have been harassed and missionaries forbidden to return to the country. Protestant groups too have complained of persecution. Jehovah's Witnesses, in particular, have reported mass persecution of their 7,000 members in Mozambique. Their religious beliefs do not permit them to take part in political activity, consequently many Witnesses have been arrested and imprisoned. Specific cases of brutality have been reported, together with the introduction of a radio and press campaign against them. Alarm at impending atheistic totalitarianism has also been expressed by atheists and agnostics who

are concerned with possible repercussions in the field of human and civil rights. (*Guardian* 19 December 1975, and *The Sunday Times* 28 December 1975, p. 5.)

## *China Attacks Religion in USSR*

In an article entitled "Dire Consequences of Soviet Revisionists' All-Round Capitalist Restoration", Ming Sung in *Peking Review* of 18 October 1974 condemns the growth of religious superstition in the Soviet Union. The journal states that in order to prop up its reactionary rule the Soviet authorities use religious superstition to benumb the Soviet people, openly asserting that the Orthodox Church is a "tool to transform social relations" and that Christianity has become "communist Christianity". They have published tens of thousands of copies of the Bible and prayer books and Bible stories for children. They have spent millions of roubles in helping various missions to restore churches. They support the setting up of theological institutes and correspondence courses in theology for the purpose of training theologians. Religious superstition is rampant. Even Party members, Komsomol members and soldiers take part in religious activities.

## *Patriarch Pimen Proposes Meeting of World Religions*

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Pimen, has suggested that representatives of world religions should meet in Moscow in 1976. *Novosti*, the Soviet press agency, reports that the initiative has the support of "all

Churches and religious bodies in the Soviet Union". Representatives of the Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic Churches, of Islam, Buddhism and Judaism have formed a committee to prepare the meeting, headed by the Metropolitan of Tula and Belev, Yuvenali. The meeting is to confer on the subjects of peace and international security. (*Idea*, 20 October 1975, p. 3.)

#### *Closer Links for Soviet Jews*

A series of initiatives which could bring about positive changes in the religious life of Soviet Jews were discussed by Dr. Moses Rosen, the Chief Rabbi of Romania, during his visit to Moscow last year. Dr. Rosen reviewed the religious problems of Soviet Jews separately with Rabbi Yaakov Fishman, of Moscow Synagogue; Mr. Mikhail Tandeitnik, the synagogue's lay chairman; and Mr. Victor Titov, the deputy chairman of the Soviet Council for Religious Affairs. Rabbi Fishman, Mr. Tandeitnik and Dr. Rosen all agreed that closer co-operation between the Jewish religious communities in all East European countries, including the Soviet Union, was necessary. They also agreed that in order to "eliminate vestiges of the cold war" in Jewish life, it was desirable that Soviet Jewry should take part in the activities of religious and cultural international Jewish organizations. It would appear that the Soviet authorities are sympathetic to these proposals. As the first step towards fostering these closer links two suggestions will be implemented. One is that there will be frequent exchange visits between Dr. Rosen and the leaders of the Moscow Synagogue. The other is that in addition to the two Moscow students now undergoing training at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Budapest, two more will be sent to Bucharest. (See: *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 May 1975, p. 5.)

#### *Chief Rabbi Visits Jewish Community in the Soviet Union*

Dr. Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, paid a ten-day visit to the USSR on 15-25 December 1975. He described his visit as a "memorable reunion with our long-suffering brethren". He was able to impress on the Soviet authorities the importance of allowing

Jews to emigrate to "a fuller life in Israel". However, he described his bitter emotions at seeing the desolation of Jewish spiritual and cultural life among the once-flourishing Jewish communities of Moscow and Leningrad. In Leningrad the Chief Rabbi was shown the grave of their last rabbi, who died three years ago. Jews are deprived of even the minor privileges accorded to other nationalities and religions, stated Dr. Jakobovits. He compared the lack of Jewish cultural or religious institutes or journals to the seminaries and publication facilities of the Russian Orthodox Church. (*The Times*, 17 December 1975, p. 5 and 6 January 1976, p. 10.)

#### *Jewish Religious Court Established in USSR*

With the consent of the Soviet authorities, a special Beth Din, or religious court, has been established in the Soviet Union to handle the cases of former Russian Jews now living abroad who wish to divorce their husbands or wives who have remained behind in Russia. Rabbi Pinhas Teitz, from New Jersey, who made the necessary arrangements, stated during a visit to Israel that there were some 500 such divorce cases to be settled. Rabbi Teitz is to take personal charge of the court's relations with similar courts in other countries. (*Jewish Chronicle*, 21 November 1975, p. 40.)

#### *Ukrainian Catholic Priest Hanged*

An Eastern-Rite Catholic priest, Fr. Mikhail Lutsky, was found hanged in a wood near the village of Dronovo in Western Ukraine in January 1975. A suicide note in his pocket claimed that he had decided to kill himself after reading the Bible. But Christians in the village, who knew Fr. Lutsky to be a holy man, described this as false. The priest had been called out early on the morning of 30 January by plain-clothes policemen who asked him to visit a sick man. He was then taken to a wood and hanged, it is claimed. Fr. Lutsky had already been warned three times that his religious activities were illegal. He had celebrated Mass and distributed the Eucharist. The Eastern-Rite Church is unable to operate openly at all in the Soviet Union. (*Catho-*

*lic Herald*, 3 October 1975, p. 1; reported from *L'Osservatore Romano*.)

#### *The Lutheran Church in Latvia*

According to statistics given by Lutheran Archbishop Dr. Janis Matulis of Latvia on his trip to the United States in February 1975, there are at present 350,000 Lutherans in Latvia. These worship in 214 congregations. There are 182 churches and an additional 20 buildings used for church services. Another source reports that in August 1975 three women were ordained as deaconesses in the Johannes Cathedral in Riga. The deaconesses, one aged 34 and the others in their 60s, each serve several congregations performing the functions of a pastor due to a shortage of male pastors. (*Glaube in der 2 Welt* 11/75, pp. 26-27.)

#### *More Priests for US Diplomats in USSR*

The Soviet government has given permission for the number of Catholic priests serving the diplomatic community in Moscow to be increased. At present, under an agreement made in 1933 when the United States first entered into diplomatic relations with the USSR, only one priest is allowed. Now, according to Mr. R. Sargent Shriver, a Washington attorney who has returned from a business trip to Moscow, four or five priests may be accepted in Moscow and possibly another in Leningrad. Mr. Shriver was told by Soviet officials that a request for these appointments would be received "in the spirit of Helsinki". (*Catholic Herald*, 17 October 1975, p. 2.)

#### *Russian Orthodox Church Supports New Society*

A new organization for the encouragement of Russian emigrants' interest in the Soviet Union has been founded in Moscow. Called the *Rodina* (Motherland) Society, it will aim to make contact with Russians living abroad and foster an interest in the developments of Soviet life, culture and politics. One of its purposes is to lessen the influence of anti-Soviet émigré organizations on "progressive" elements in the Russian community abroad, especially the young. The society is supported by various bodies including the Russian Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Alexi of Tal-

lin and Estonia was present at the founding conference. (*Pravda*, 16 December 1975, p. 2; *Sovetskaya Kirgizia*, 31 December 1975, p. 4.)

#### *Seventh Day Adventist Mother Harassed*

Maria Ivanovna Vlasyuk, a Seventh Day Adventist mother from the Ukraine, is threatened with the loss of custody of her eldest child, Svetlana, aged ten. In April 1975 the court of the Starosinyavsky district decided that Svetlana should be put into care. Her religious upbringing was said to have "deprived her of childhood joys": she had to join in religious rites, was kept from school on Saturdays, and suffered poor health as a result of her "participation in a religious sect". Her younger brother, Victor, aged six, however, was allowed to remain with his mother. An appeal to a higher court only confirmed the decision, referring to the Law on Marriage and the Family, which states that parents must bring up their children in the moral code of the builders of communism. After this, rumours spread that Mrs. Vlasyuk had "sacrificed" Svetlana, who was still at home pending a final confirmation of the court's decision. Police visited the Vlasyuk home on 15 June, demanding to see Svetlana and promising they would not take her away. A crowd gathered, alarming the child, who ran away, while the mother fainted. No further news of the family is available at present. (*Chronicle of Current Events*, No. 37.)

#### *Reform Baptist Released Early*

I. A. Senkevich, a 69-year-old Reform Baptist from Grodno in Belorussia, was released from camp towards the end of September 1975, according to a letter received by friends in the West from his wife, Antonina. He was sentenced in 1972 to five years detention in a strict regime camp. This was his second sentence.

#### *Soviet Baptist Dies*

Trofim Yemelyanovich Bondar, a 77-year-old Reform Baptist, died on 3 February 1975 soon after his release from labour camp. In 1971 Bondar was charged with using his home for prayer

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courtroom, but was repeatedly told that no seats were available. Dr. Sakharov has often cited Kovalev's case as an example of Soviet pressure on human rights campaigners, and has called on people in the West to support their cause. (*Guardian*, 13 December 1975, p.2.)

#### *Prominent Protestant Church Leaders in Poland*

Two well-known Polish Protestant clergymen were elected to new positions of prominence. On 23 February 1975, the Sixth Synod of the Lutheran Church in Poland elected Janusz Narzynski as bishop to replace retiring bishop, A. Wantula. Narzynski, who is 47, is a professor at the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw and has become widely known through numerous publications concerning the history of the Reformation in Poland. He is also known because of his work as Polish representative on such international Church councils as the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation. Other people know him through his wife, Barbara Enholz-Narzynska, who is director of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Poland. A colleague of his at the academy, Dr. Witold Benedyktowicz, Professor of Systematic Theology, was recently elected President of the Polish Ecumenical Council. He replaced Bishop Jan Miewieczeral, bishop of the Reformed Church who retired after 15 years in the post. Dr. Benedyktowicz, who is 49, is General Superintendent of the Methodist Church in Poland. He too has published theological articles and is best known for his work in the Christian Peace Conference.

#### *Shortage of Catholic Churches in Poland*

Difficulties are being encountered in Poland in the building of new churches, according to the Secretariat of the Polish Hierarchy. Especially in the cities, population growth has made new or enlarged churches necessary, and in some districts there are no churches at all. The difficulties are caused by the refusal of the authorities to give the necessary permission for building. In many cases, materials and labour have been given

voluntarily by the local Catholics. (*Catholic Herald*, 2 January 1976, p. 8.)

#### *Polish Pilgrims Flock to Holy Year Celebrations*

Over 3,000 pilgrims from Poland visited Rome during October, which may be a sign of better relations between the Catholic Church and President Gierek's government. Over 2,000 were flown to Rome aboard special flights organized by the Polish Tourist Agency and accompanied by special guides. Others came in small parties, many in connection with the beatification of Mother Theresa Ledochowska, a Polish-born nun. The delegation was led by Cardinals Wyszynski and Wojtyla, and was welcomed to Rome by Archbishop Luigi Poggi and by representatives of the Polish emigré community in Rome. At a celebration of High Mass on 11 October, the Pope warmly welcomed the Polish pilgrims, urging them to maintain their faith "no matter what dangers they might face".

#### *Polish Bishops Criticize State Monopoly of Media*

In a pastoral letter dated 21 September 1975, Poland's Catholic bishops called on the authorities to cease what it termed the "cultural terror" exercised by the media, which are allowed only to speak for the official anti-religious and materialistic ideology. The letter urged Catholic parents to protect their children from the influence of the media, and to protest openly about radio and television programmes which "harm religious feelings and good morals". Furthermore, the bishops requested access to the mass media for believers, and in particular asked permission for at least one religious broadcast per week, aimed primarily at hospital patients. The Polish Church authorities have repeatedly attempted in the past to gain some access to the mass media for non-Marxists. Cardinal Wyszynski has repeatedly raised the issue in his sermons in Warsaw, stating that Catholic writers should be allowed to express their views publicly. So far such petitions have met with no success, but Catholics are determined to keep on trying.