

Chronicle

Christian Prisoners in the USSR 1979-1980

The number of Christian prisoners known to Keston College continued to rise during 1981 and by the end of the year had reached 350. This is almost double the number known three years ago, when the booklet *Christian Prisoners in the USSR 1979* was compiled. The net increase during 1979 was 52, during 1980 it was 75 and during 1981 it was 43. There were 81 arrests reported during 1979, 113 during 1980 and 120 during 1981. These figures indicate that the much-publicized pre-Olympic purge of dissidents during 1979-80 has continued unabated with the level of arrests even increasing slightly. Sentences inflicted on Christian prisoners during this period range from ten months to thirteen years. The largest increases have been among Seventh-Day Adventists, Baptists and Lithuanian Catholics.

The number of Adventist prisoners has quadrupled from 13 to 56, despite 23 releases over the period, and two deaths. The majority of Adventist prisoners were arrested while distributing clandestinely-printed "Open letters" refuting slanderous articles against their church and its leaders appearing in the Soviet press. In these cases they were invariably charged under Article 190-1 of the RSFSR Criminal Code (and the corresponding articles in the other republics' criminal codes) "circulation of deliberately false fabrications slandering the Soviet state and social system", with a maximum sentence of three years' labour camp. Some were sentenced to as little as eighteen months or received suspended sentences. Among heavier sentences were those of four, four and seven years respectively received by Yakov Dolgotoy, Anatoli Ryskal and Arnold Spalin at a trial in Stavropol in June 1979 for operating a clandestine printing press; Semyon Bakholdin and Timofei Krivoberets, sentenced to seven years' camp and three years' exile and eight years'

camp and five years' exile respectively for allegedly giving bribes (Bakholdin died in a prison camp hospital in November 1980); and Rostislav Galetsky, sentenced to five years' camp in March 1981 under RSFSR Criminal Code Article 227, "infringement of the person and rights of citizens under the guise of performing religious rituals" for his organizational activity in the Church of True and Free Seventh Day Adventists. The leader of this church, Vladimir Shelkov, was sentenced to five years' strict regime camp under the same article in March 1979 and died in labour camp in January 1980. An unusually high proportion of the Adventist prisoners are women.

The number of known Baptist prisoners trebled over the same period from 37 to 129 despite the release on completion of sentence of 54 prisoners over the three years. The range of charges brought against Baptists is quite wide, but almost all relate directly or indirectly to church leadership and the conduct of religious services or to the provision or distribution of clandestinely-printed religious literature. Generally speaking the sentences range from two to five years, with the number of five-year sentences under Article 227 of the RSFSR Criminal Code increasing. Four members of the unregistered Baptists' executive body, the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, are currently serving five-year sentences under this article, while a fifth is serving a three-year sentence. The Ukrainian equivalent of Article 227 carries a maximum penalty of five years' camp and five years' exile. This maximum sentence had not been imposed on a Baptist since 1974 until the trial in December 1980 of pastor Nikolai Boiko from Odessa, who received this sentence only three years after returning home on completion of a similar sentence imposed in 1968. Other Baptists have

been charged under Article 142 of the RSFSR Criminal Code and its equivalents: "violation of the laws on the separation of church and state". This article covers any kind of religious activity not permitted by the 1929 "Law on Religious Associations", i.e. anything other than worship within a registered church building. Even conduct of the worship of an unregistered congregation can be considered a "criminal" offence under this article. A number of Baptists have been charged under Article 190-3 "organization of, or active participation in, group actions which disrupt public order". The "offence" is usually connected with the conduct of open-air baptism. A fairly large number of the Baptist prisoners were involved with the printing or distribution of Christian literature. Two printing presses were discovered in 1980 and various items of equipment and stocks of literature were confiscated during searches or traffic checks. Fifteen Baptists, mostly young and including eight women, were sentenced to three to four years each for operating the two presses under RSFSR Criminal Code Article 162 (and the Ukrainian Article 148) "engaging in a prohibited trade". The most savage sentences meted out to Baptists in this period were to a group of four from the Kiev church who were suspected of involvement with clandestine printing. Unable to find any firm evidence linking the four with printing, the KGB investigator apparently resorted to fabrication of a case of embezzlement of state property. Two trial judges refused to convict on the evidence presented and sent the case back for further investigation. All the prosecution witnesses are said to have given evidence favourable to the defendants and the defence lawyers called for their clients to be acquitted, an action almost unheard of in political and religious cases. Subsequently two of the lawyers were barred from practising as a result. Finally at the third trial, after fifteen months of pre-trial detention (the normal maximum permitted is nine months), the four were found guilty. Ivan Kirilyuk was sentenced to twelve years' camp, Vyacheslav Zayats to ten years', Viktor Litovchenko to seven years' camp, since commuted to working on a construction site, presently in Siberia, while Viktor Draga was sentenced to three years' camp.

The third group which has seen a substantial proportionate increase in the number of its prisoners is the Roman Catholic Church.

Almost all the known prisoners are from Lithuania. The number has doubled from 12 to 24, even though nine prisoners were released over the period. Many of those arrested were involved in the production of the *samizdat Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, and in these cases the sentences imposed were all below the maximum; for example Anastazas Janulis and Povilas Buzas, who were tried in November 1980 on charges of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" for duplicating the *Chronicle* and other religious *samizdat* were sentenced to 3½ and 1½ years' camp respectively. Three Lithuanian Catholics were sentenced for organizing pilgrimages to national shrines. The heaviest sentence imposed in this period was the maximum for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" of seven years' camp and five years' exile imposed in December 1980 on Vytautas Skuodis, author of a study of atheism in Lithuania entitled "Spiritual Genocide in Lithuania", which had not yet been completed, let alone circulated.

Dissenting Adventists and Baptists and Lithuanian Catholics are all well equipped for collecting information about prisoners from their ranks and making sure that the details are known abroad. This does not apply to the other denominations with significant numbers of prisoners: Orthodox, Eastern-Rite Catholics and Pentecostals. The present position of a number of the prisoners from these three denominations is unknown: in each case the prisoner has been mentioned in only one *samizdat* source. Some were reported to be detained in psychiatric hospitals, others were serving camp sentences the length of which was not known. Many political dissidents are Orthodox Christians or Catholics; it is not always clear what role their faith has played in their involvement in the defence of human rights. However, a number of Orthodox Christians were arrested in the period under review for activity directly related to the Christian faith. Fr Gleb Yakunin was sentenced in 1980 to five years' camp and five years' exile on charges of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" (RSFSR Criminal Code Article 70) for his exposure of state control of the Russian Orthodox Church and his leadership of the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights. Two leaders of the Christian Seminar on the Problems of the Religious Renaissance in Russia, Vladimir Poresh and Alexander Ogorodnikov,

were both sentenced in 1980 under Article 70 to five years' camp and three years' exile and six years' camp and five years' exile respectively. Three other members of the Seminar were sentenced in 1979-80: Viktor Popkov and Vladimir Burtsev have already completed 18-month sentences, Tatyana Shchipkova is still serving a three-year sentence in an isolated and insanitary camp in the Soviet Far East. Occasionally news emerges of prisoners arrested years ago who were previously unknown. Fr Iosif Mikhailov, from Ufa in the Bashkir ASSR, spent ten years in Kazan Special Psychiatric Hospital before his case was eventually made known in 1981. He is still there.

Between 1979 and the end of 1981 thirty Pentecostals were arrested, 15 of them in 1981. The two largest categories were young men who refused to serve in the Soviet army and leaders of the Pentecostal emigration movement. Most of the latter category received heavy sentences: Nikolai Goretoi seven years' camp and five years' exile; Nikolai Bobarykin six years' camp and five years' exile; and Pavel Akhtyorov seven years' camp and five years' exile, all for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" connected with the compilation of documents of the emigration movement. Four leaders of the church in Taromskoye, a suburb of Dnepropetrovsk, were sentenced to five years' camp and five years' exile each, and a fifth to three years' camp and three years' exile, all under the Ukrainian equivalent of Article 227; the church as well as being unregistered was active in the emigration movement. In the town of Maloyaroslavets, Kaluga region, Ivan Fedotov and Vladimir Murashkin were sentenced to five years' camp each under Article 227.

The internment of Christians in psychiatric hospitals also continues, with the victims often seemingly picked at random, though those previously interned for however short a period are particularly vulnerable. Pentecostal emigration activist Fyodor Sidenko arrested in October 1979 was charged with "dissemination of deliberately false fabrications slandering the Soviet State and social system" but was ruled not responsible for his actions and sent to the Chernyakhovsk Special Psychiatric Hospital, where the drugs he is receiving affect him so badly that his wife was not sure that he recognized her on her last visit. His previous psychiatric record consisted of internment during the visit of President Ford to Vladivostok to

sign the SALT agreement in 1974. Baptist Vladimir Khailo, who also wishes to emigrate with his family, was arrested in autumn 1980 and sentenced to indefinite detention in Dnepropetrovsk Special Psychiatric Hospital. Lithuanian Catholic Dr Algirdas Statkevicius, who had previously spent three years in psychiatric hospital as a political prisoner, was rearrested in February 1980 and sentenced to indefinite hospital treatment in August 1980. He is also in Chernyakhovsk hospital. He is a psychiatrist himself, and was involved with the Lithuanian Helsinki Monitoring Group and a group of people working to establish a Christian temperance movement.

A disturbing trend over these three years has been the rearrest of prisoners to face new charges before the end of their first sentence. A number of Christian prisoners have been affected in this way. Alexander Ogorodnikov was charged with "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" while serving a one-year sentence for "parasitism" (that is, being unemployed); the indictment related largely to activity prior to his first arrest but also specified activity in the labour camp where he was serving the one-year sentence. Vasili Barladyanu, an Eastern-Rite Catholic, was rearrested while serving a three-year sentence for "slandering the Soviet state and social system" (for circulating documents on abuses of human rights) and sentenced to a further three years under the same article, apparently for giving lectures on Ukrainian culture to his fellow prisoners. Paruir Airikian, an Armenian Christian, was accused of getting extra food parcels into the camp where he was serving his sentence by means of bribery. Although the prosecution evidence was rather shaky and the case was referred back by the procuracy for further investigation, Airikian was eventually sentenced in September 1980 to an additional three years' camp. Merab Kostava, a Georgian Orthodox Christian and human rights activist, was rearrested with only a few months of exile of his original sentence left to serve and charged with "resisting a militiaman" for which he was sentenced to five years' camp in December 1981. Mikhail Kukobaka, an Orthodox Christian, was also rearrested towards the end of a three-year sentence for "slandering the Soviet state and social system". He is reported to be facing new charges under the same article of the Criminal Code, but has not yet been tried.