

The Primate is simply stalling. The episcopate reasserted its long-standing position in a communiqué on 2 May:

The settlement of basic problems between the state and the church will create conditions for resuming diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Polish state.

In other words, the bishops want to see the church's relations with the state put on a clear legal foundation before they will accept any direct agreement between Rome and Warsaw.

There are fears in some circles that the establishment of a legal status for the church may further divide the hierarchy from the ordinary believers. On the one hand, it would entitle priests to state benefits, medical treatment, insurance and so on — but it would also make it more difficult for the church to support the "illegal" activities of underground groups such as Solidarity and (more

topically) Freedom and Peace. Both these groups enjoy popular sympathy. In the past, the church has afforded active opponents of the government both encouragement and protection — this role would have to be whittled down if church-state relations were given a legal grounding.

The hierarchy will not accept official links between the Holy See and Warsaw unless the church's status is legally recognised within the system of government (even if this is not popular with the church at grass-roots level). The Pope understands the dilemma, but regards the establishment of Vatican-Warsaw relations as in the best interests of Poland's believers. The Polish government makes no secret of its wish to enjoy full diplomatic relations with the Holy See. The situation holds the ingredients of a stalemate.

GARETH DAVIES

Major Church Events in the GDR (Summer 1987)

Twenty-five thousand in a football stadium in the Berlin suburb of Köpenick, 80,000 attending an open-air gathering on the banks of the River Elbe at Dresden: the summer of 1987 saw two major events which amply demonstrated the strength of the East German churches, and their determination to make a major impact on society. These were the Berlin *Kirchentag* organised by the Protestant Church of Berlin-Brandenburg, and the Dresden "Meeting of Catholics", which was intended to bring together Catholics from all parts of the GDR.

Long and painstaking negotiations

with the civil authorities preceded both events. The Protestant Church, in planning this independent commemoration of Berlin's 750th birthday, had no wish to have it submerged in the state-run festivities. The Catholics, in their bid to hold what was to be the first Catholic meeting of this kind in the GDR, did not find negotiations easy either.

The main focus of the *Kirchentag* was the 11 "working groups", which tackled a range of topics, including "The search for security in one's community", "Men and women in church and society", "Work and leisure", and "Reconciliation be-

tween Poles and Germans". The group "Jews and Christians as children of one Father" was best attended. Although much valuable work was done, there was some disappointment that the number who registered for the groups — some 6,000 — fell short of the 10,000 or so hoped for. Plenty of interest, however, was shown at the concluding ceremony in Köpenick: the preacher was an Anglican, the Very Revd John Arnold, Dean of Rochester; he had been chosen for this task as a fluent German speaker and a representative of the Ecumenical movement. His message to the city was based on Jeremiah 7:1-3 (the passage from which the motto of the *Kirchentag* — "I will live with you" — was taken).

As was almost inevitable, a large measure of attention was claimed by a single aspect of the church's activity — the relationship of the various "grass-roots groups" to the Protestant authorities. The work of these groups, and their sometimes questionable allegiance to the organised church has long presented problems for the Protestant leadership. Most of the members of these groups are at times bitterly critical of the church, but they value the kind of protection for their activities which, in the GDR, only organised religion can afford. The church leaders, for their part, recognise that the groups do represent a viewpoint which is broadly in line with the Gospel. They also have to bear in mind that a number of their own younger supporters regard orthodox Protestantism as too hide-bound and traditionalist, and too absorbed in ecclesiastical detail. There had been rumours that the "grass-roots" movement might occupy one of the conference centres and disrupt the whole *Kirchentag*. In the event, the organisers wisely avoided a heavy-handed approach — which might

have led to undue focus on the movement — and instead gave the "grass-roots" elements ample opportunity to have their say.

Given the venue of the *Kirchentag*, it was unlikely that tension could be avoided completely. One highly provocative exhibition on the history of the city had to be closed down. On the whole, though, the event passed off happily, and was deemed a success. East Germans and foreigners alike were surprised by the measure of freedom granted to the church for the event. One visiting television crew reported that, once official permission had been given to work in Berlin, the authorities made no attempt to supervise or obstruct their work — a request to interview a dissident met with the response "this is purely a church affair". Clearly, the "sphere of independence" ascribed to the Protestant Church in the GDR is no empty formula.

The three days (10, 11 and 12 July) of the Catholic event in Dresden corresponded to three stages. The first day was a pastoral occasion: about 1,200 priests and accredited lay people met in private to hear an address given by Cardinal Ratzinger, and to discuss the church's handling of problem issues in the GDR. On the second day there was a special service in the (Protestant) Kreuzkirche, at which Cardinal Meisner, the head of the Catholic Church in the GDR, preached. This occasion was followed by the so-called "Small Catholic Meeting", which involved some 3,000 delegates in ten working groups. Questions relating to the third world, the search for peace, ecology, and family and parish were discussed. The final day saw a pilgrimage to the Cathedral from the banks of the Elbe, in which about 80,000 people — about one in 12 of the Catholic population of the GDR — participated.

Although little was published

about the private discussions, it appears that there were echoes in Dresden of the Protestants' experience with "grass-roots" dissidents. Banners calling attention to issues of, for example, ecology, abortion, peace, and the misuse of power represented the long-standing feeling among some Catholic lay people that the church has failed to take up a clear public stance on social issues.

Cardinal Meisner was reported as stating that "Christians must do their duty as churchmen and as citizens," and "Christians must not turn to the church as a mere place of refuge for pious persons. This land of ours is home for us Christians, as Christ lives in it." Such words, though measured, led to speculation that the Catholic Church might in future co-operate more readily with the state. No doubt too much was made of the Cardinal's pronouncements,

but the fact remains that the "Catholic Meeting" was reported very enthusiastically by the official press, and television news and current events programmes devoted a surprising amount of time to the occasion.

A remarkable degree of co-operation between the Protestant and Catholic Churches was evident during the summer events. For some years there has been no little distrust and misunderstanding between the Catholic and Protestant leaderships; these feelings partly reflect traditional conflicts dating from the Reformation, but spring also from differing attitudes to the state. There is now a much greater demand from the grass-roots for a "common front", and it seems as if there is progress in this direction.

ARVAN GORDON

Conscientious Objection: The Situation in Yugoslavia

Conscientious objection is becoming an important issue among young people in various countries of Eastern Europe. In the GDR, young men who object to bearing arms on grounds of conscience can now serve as *Bausoldaten* (mostly working on construction sites); in Poland the "Freedom and Peace" movement has taken up the cases of Jehovah's Witnesses who have been imprisoned; the pacifist nature of the Hungarian Basis communities is well known.* But it is only in the last year or so that the issue has become important in Yugoslavia.

As the law in Yugoslavia stands at the moment, all men over the age of 18 are required to perform

12 months' basic military service, followed by reserve duties. Conscientious objection is not recognised as a right, and there is no provision for alternative civilian service. The only concession made to those who for reasons of conscience will not handle weapons was introduced in 1985: the federal authorities

*For recent articles and documents on conscientious objectors in the GDR, the "Freedom and Peace" movement in Poland, and the pacifist stance of the Hungarian basis communities, see, respectively, *RCL* Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 282-97; Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 320-23; Vol. 15 No. 1, pp.96-101.