

Editorial

There is more public debate going on in the Soviet Union today than at any time since the 1920s. The atmosphere is heavy with *glasnost* and every day areas are opened up for discussion which would have been completely out of bounds months, even weeks, earlier. The Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in June saw lively debate in a mood of almost joyful optimism. We hope to report fully on the Council and subsequent developments in the next issue of *RCL*. *Glasnost* is having its effect on religious debate just as in other areas of Soviet life. It must be said, however, that *perestroika*, the introduction of real change, still lags a long way behind, not least as far as revisions in state legislation on religion are concerned. In her article on pp. 237-49, Marite Sapiets looks at the unexpected phenomenon of a religious revival movement in the Lutheran Church in the Baltic republic of Latvia. One concrete result has been the appointment by the church of a "pastor of the youth movement". Under present Soviet law, a church youth movement is illegal. Is this a sign that the promised new Soviet law on religion will make provision for church youth work? At the moment we can only speculate: legal *perestroika* is still in the future.

A central problem with *perestroika*, of course, is that the Communist Party intends to retain control over its form, its content and the pace of its introduction. One of the side-effects of *glasnost*, however, has been that certain sectors of the population have begun saying what kind of changes *they* would like to see and have even begun taking matters into their own hands, as in the case of the current dispute between Armenia and Azerbaidzhan. The western media are fond of describing the antagonists in this dispute as "Christian Armenia" and "Muslim Azerbaidzhan" as though by doing so they had explained the essence of the conflict. The religious factor is an element, of course, but so are the political and nationalist factors, and they all need to be put in context: see the Chronicle piece on pp. 252-54 of this issue of *RCL*.

Another dispute with ethnic and religious ingredients has created an unprecedented level of open tension between two Warsaw Pact

countries. - Romania and Hungary are at loggerheads over the treatment of the largest national minority in Europe, the two million Hungarians living in Transylvania. There is an awareness on both sides that under the leadership of Gorbachev the Soviet Union is unlikely to interfere in this dispute. The Soviet government has renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine, according to which the Soviet Union reserved the right to offer "fraternal assistance" to its Warsaw Pact neighbours, as for example to Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Chronicle piece on pp. 254-56 looks at the response of the Hungarian churches to the growing problem, unprecedented in post-war Eastern Europe, of refugees — mostly Hungarians but also Romanians — flooding from Transylvania into Budapest.

In these disputes, then, religious factors are important in various different ways. Religion is part of the national identity of Armenians, Azeris and Hungarians. The anti-religious policies of an increasingly despotic regime in Romania contrast ever more sharply with the liberalism and cultural pluralism prevailing in Hungary. And it is the churches in Hungary which are taking the initiative in formulating a practical response to a particular social tragedy.

The redrawing of political boundaries is a factor in both these disputes. Another boundary, which was redrawn at the end of the Second World War, was the western frontier of Poland. In an important article (pp. 196-209) Grazyna Sikorska looks at how this move affected the local religious communities and gave rise to longstanding controversy and resentment. The specific problem at issue was the ownership of the church buildings which had formerly belonged to German Lutherans in areas now being resettled by Polish Roman Catholics. In her article the author concentrates on what actually happened in one particular region, the Opole diocese, and shows how reasonable and well-intentioned procedures were rendered problematic by changes in the religious policy of the new Polish government.

She ends her article on an optimistic note, however, describing attempts since the 1970s to improve relations between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, and speaking of "new hopes for real Christian cooperation among the various denominations in Poland".

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