

# RELIGION, STATE and SOCIETY

Volume 20 Number 2 1992

Editorial	iii
Notes on contributors	133
Christian Democracy in Russia RICHARD SAKWA	135
Documentary Appendix:	
Declaration of the Constituent Assembly of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement (RCDM)	171
The Fundamental Principles of the Political Programme of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement	179
Statutes of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement	187
Speech at the First Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR	191
The Situation in Our Country (a Resolution of the RCDM Duma)	195
The Duma of the RCDM Appeals to Its Regional Organisations	199
Russian Christian Democracy from a Regional Perspective: The Case of St Petersburg ROANNE THOMAS EDWARDS	201
The Rise and Fall of <i>Pamyat'</i> ? MICHAEL HUGHES	213
Patriarch Aleksii II: Between the Hammer and the Anvil MICHAEL BOURDEAUX	231
Patriarch Aleksii II: a Personal Impression JOHN ARNOLD	237
Patriarch Aleksii II: I Accept Responsibility for all that Happened G. ALIMOV AND G. CHARODEYEV	241

A Culture of Ecumenical Convergence? Reflections on the Czech Experience JAROSLAV KREJČÍ	247
Book Reviews	257
<i>Religion under Socialism in China</i> by Luo Zhufeng	
<i>Prayers and Thoughts of Chinese Christians</i> by Kim-Kwong Chan and Alan Hunter	
<i>La Tentation de l'Est: Religion, Pouvoir et Nationalisme</i> by Raphael Aubert	
<i>The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict</i> by Hugh Poulton	
Letter to the Editor	263

## **Editorial**

Christian Democratic parties are an established feature of the Western European political scene. Several common features are typical of these parties. First, their programmes are based more or less explicitly on Christian teaching. Second, they aim to operate on the basis of a wide synthesis of views from all parts of the political spectrum. Third, they operate in an empirical manner, developing their programmes on the basis of and in response to the lessons of historical experience rather than in accordance with *a priori* theory.

Paradoxically, it is these common features which tend to guarantee that the various parties are heterogeneous both internally and as compared with one another. Michael Fleet points out in his book *The Rise and Fall of Chilean Christian Democracy* that 'Ludwig Erhard, who believed in the freedom and justice of the marketplace, and the leaders of the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail, who call for class struggle and public ownership of the means of production, invoke the same Christian Democratic tradition.'

One explanation for this state of affairs, highlighted by Michael Fleet, and alluded to by Roanne Thomas Edwards in her article in this issue of *RSS*, is that the Catholic social philosophy and papal encyclicals on which western Christian Democracy is based provide 'foundational values' but no specific framework of sociological analysis and hence no particular political programme.

Christian Democratic parties are arguably at their most stable when they are in power. In this position they often flourish as effective coalitions of different interest groups or even as patronage mechanisms. The tendency to split along left-right ideological lines is always present, however.

In February 1990 Gorbachev persuaded the Central Committee of the CPSU to renounce its constitutionally guaranteed 'leading role' in Soviet political life. Eight months later a Law on Public Associations laid the formal basis for a multi-party system. By the end of the year there were hundreds of parties operating in the USSR. Many of these were 'sofa parties'—all their members could sit on the same sofa.

Parties continue to proliferate. Fragmentation is a feature of the post-Soviet political scene. Much of this issue of *RSS* is devoted to an examination of the history of the Christian Democratic parties in post-Soviet Russia. Like the political movement *Pamyat'*, which is the subject of Michael Hughes' article in this issue, they are no exception to the splintering phenomenon.

One syndrome which exacerbates the tendency for political parties in the post-communist world to splinter is the 'post-totalitarian mentality', which includes the following elements (amongst others) as the legacy of totalitarianism: solutions are expected from strong leaders; personal opinion is identified with absolute truth; compromise is looked on as suspect and dishonourable.

The Christian Democratic parties in Russia are therefore subject to a twofold pressure: from the 'post-totalitarian mentality' and from the inherent tendency for Christian Democratic parties in particular to split—especially if they are not in power.

Christian Democratic parties are traditionally pluralist. According to Michael Fogarty in his book *Christian Democracy in Western Europe 1820–1953*, their

pluralism is of two kinds: 'horizontal' and 'vertical'.

'Horizontal' pluralism is a consequence of the espousal by Christian Democratic parties of the concept of 'subsidiarity', and is characterised by Fogarty as 'a policy which insists on the independence, rights, and responsibilities of each individual or group which can show that it has a legitimate sphere of its own: independence firstly as against others on the same level of social organisation, and secondly as against those at other and particularly higher levels.'

'Vertical' pluralism, by contrast, means that individuals at all levels of society who are united in the same 'spiritual family' or 'ideological family' should have the freedom to work out their own salvation together. These families cut vertically through society from top to bottom. 'Vertical' pluralism means, *inter alia*, the freedom for different religious confessions to be themselves, to 'sail under their own flag'. In Fogarty's words, 'Different "spiritual families" . . . should on the principle of "vertical" pluralism be permitted and enabled to follow their own way of life, even when they are in a minority in a nation or group as a whole.'

In his review of Christian Democracy in Russia, Richard Sakwa points to 'a problem that Christian Democracy in Western Europe has not fully resolved': that 'the commitment to transcendent values can sometimes lead to an underestimation of the need for democratic processes and social pluralism on earth.' Certainly Russian Christian Democrats are very conscious of the vital importance, if not the primacy, of the spiritual dimension; and they are so because they are conscious of the harm wrought by 70 years of atheist communism. The passage on 'Communism' in the *Declaration of the Constituent Assembly of the RCDM* in this issue of *RSS* states that 'the ideology of the "shining future" directs humanity towards illusory goals, and atheism serves to destroy the vertical spiritual dimension which unites man with heaven and eternity . . .'

The ideology of the 'shining future' has collapsed with the Soviet Union. Other ideologies are of necessity pressing to fill the vacuum. An urgent task for Christian Democratic parties in Russia is to define their attitudes towards the nation and the state, now that the very survival of Russia and the role of the Russian state *vis-à-vis* the other republics in the CIS are becoming paramount issues in the post-communist period. The Russian Christian Democratic Movement led by Viktor Aksyuchits, according to Sakwa, becoming 'more of a Christian "national" party and less a "Christian Democratic" one.'

It is a remarkable feature of the earlier writings of contemporary Russian Christian Democrats that they made hardly any reference to western sources, referring almost exclusively to, and claiming their roots in, prerevolutionary Russian Orthodox traditions. Now, however, the splits within Christian Democracy in Russia seem to be accompanied by a tendency for some groups to base themselves ever more explicitly on western Christian Democratic traditions. Roanne Thomas Edwards argues this persuasively in the case of the St Petersburg Christian Democrats. It also seems to be the case as far as the Christian Democratic Party of Russia founded in May 1990 is concerned. In a manifesto (in English) Aleksandr Chuyev writes: 'The party patterns its behaviour on European way of Russian development and thus is guided by European traditions of Christian Democracy. This is why CDPR is opposed to nationalistic (so-called "patriotic") forces (such as Russian Christian Democratic Movement led by V. Aksyuchits . . .)'

It seems, then, that in Russia today, and in Russian Christian Democracy perhaps in particular, the potential for different groups of citizens to cooperate to further their common interests under the banner of 'horizontal' pluralism is neutralised by the

tendency for different 'ideological families' to follow their own distinctive paths to salvation.

June 1992

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**Roanne Thomas Edwards** studied in Paris at the Institut d'Études Politiques and the Institut Nationale de Langues et Cultures Orientales. In November 1991 she received a Diplôme d'Études Approfondies in Soviet and East European Studies for which she wrote a thesis on the Leningrad Popular Front. She is now a freelance writer on contemporary social movements in Russia.