

Pentecostals Appeal

Pentecostals in the USSR claim that they could not exist legally until 1963. But since then, too, the Soviet authorities have in practice banned this sect's activities. In April 1973 some of its members began campaigning to emigrate to Israel "or any other country which does not deny the existence of God". The following Declaration comes from Ye. A. Bresenden on behalf of Pentecostals in Nakhodka and Chernogorsk. It is addressed to the U.N. Committee for Human Rights and is dated 25 February, 1974.

We submitted a declaration to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR with a request to emigrate from the USSR on religious grounds.

We were told that our declaration of 16 April, 1973 had been forwarded to the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers. Since then we have received no written reply to our declaration. By word of mouth we are told not to ask and not to petition since no one would deal with such requests. "Give us the invitation from your relatives and then we will draw up your documents for emigration" – that was the answer we got from the head of the passport desk in Nakhodka, Major Morozkin, who added that he had an instruction from a higher level not to give us a written reply to our declaration.

I therefore came to Moscow to make sure that Comrade Morozkin's words really represented a reply from the USSR government and not the reply of the local authorities. On 18 February 1974 I was received at the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs by Colonel Danilov in connection with our emigration on religious grounds from the USSR to Israel or any other country. Colonel Danilov told me that they could not draw up documents for our emigration from the USSR, since we had no invitation either from the government or from relatives in the country to which we were applying to emigrate.

I asked Colonel Danilov for permission to write a letter to the U.N. Committee for Human Rights, so that it might assist us to come to an agreement with the government of Israel or any other country which does not deny the existence of God, and which permits its citizens to live by religious convictions according to the New Testament. Colonel Danilov gave me permission to do this. I queried whether my letter would reach the addressee. He replied that it would.

Our sect of "Christians of the Evangelical Faith – Pentecostals" was officially considered illegal until 1963. We were not permitted to conduct services, they threw tear gas into homes where believers were gathered, they fined us, they threw water over us, dispersed and forcibly dragged people out of houses where believers were meeting, they tried religious ministers for leading a sect, and sentenced them to long terms in prisons and exile.

After believers from Chernogorsk handed in to the United States Embassy tape recordings and photographs, and also gave spoken testimonies about all the pressures on believers of our sect in the USSR in general, and in Chernogorsk, Krasnoyarsk *krai*, in particular, world public opinion protested to the Soviet government about violence towards believers of our sect.¹ Our

¹ This occurred in January 1963 – tr.

ministers were freed from their places of imprisonment, the official ban on the activity of our sect was lifted, but the unofficial ban has remained. We are still forbidden to conduct peaceful prayer meetings, we are fined and threatened with imprisonment, and this is known to the representatives of the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers, comrade Shlandakov in Nakhodka, Primorsky *krai*, and official representatives in Chernogorsk, Krasnoyarsk *krai*.

When we submitted our declaration requesting permission to emigrate, the deputy president of the Nakhodka soviet's executive committee called us traitors, betrayers of the Motherland, he threatened to put us on trial and to remove our children. When we said that emigration is not a crime but the right of every man, and that the Soviet government had ratified the pact on human rights, then the procurator of Nakhodka, Bokhan, said: "We don't give a damn for international laws, we couldn't care less about them! We have an instruction from the Minister and that's what we work by." He said this in the name of the State authority. The fact that we cannot obtain permission to emigrate on religious grounds proves that the procurator of Nakhodka is right. We have not received a single written reply to the three declarations that we have submitted.

We beg you to help us to emigrate from the USSR. I am writing this declaration on behalf of 80 believers and their families who want to emigrate to Israel or another country, where we could live according to our convictions.

This declaration from believers in Nakhodka, Primorsky *krai* and Chernogorsk, Krasnoyarsk *krai*, was written by Yevgeni Adolfovich Bresenden of Primorsky *krai*, Nakhodka, ul. Lineinaya, pervy ryad, d.3a.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Michael Bourdeaux will be in the USA and Canada from approximately 27 August to 20 September. Anyone who would like to organize a speaking engagement for him should write to the Centre's USA address: CSRC, P.O. Box 601, Elgin, Ill 60120, USA.

Five lectures, entitled "Christians and Marxists", will be given by Professor José Miguez-Bonino at the Central London Polytechnic, starting on Monday 3 June. Write to: The Registrar, London Lectures, 12 Weymouth Street, London WIN 3FB.