

and charged with vagrancy. Protesting against this arbitrariness, he has already for more than four months been on a hunger strike which is threatening his life. The trial is expected in the coming weeks, and he is once again threatened with a prison sentence.

Vins enjoys enormous authority and love among his fellow-believers. By interceding in his defence you will be helping all the Evangelical Christians and Baptists who have now been persecuted for many years by the authorities in the worst traditions of religious intolerance of the Middle Ages and of the Tsarist authorities in the time of Pobedonostsev, in the 1890's.

Arrest, the breaking up of prayer meetings, fines, discrimination in schools and at work, and, as the height of inhumanity, the taking away of children from their parents – all this is the lot of the Baptists and to one degree or another of many other religious groups who are inconvenient to the authorities (Uniates, Pentecostals, members of the "True Orthodox Church" and several other groups). These illegalities demand the intervention of the world-wide public.

Freedom of conscience is an individual part of freedom as a whole. Honest people throughout the world should defend the victims of religious persecutions wherever these take place – in little Albania or in the vast Soviet Union.

11 September 1974
Moscow

Andrei Sakharov,
Academician

Pastor Vins in Prison

Georgi Vins was born in 1928. He received a higher education and holds two degrees, one in economics and one in engineering. As a leader of the initsiativniki he was arrested in 1966, tried in November and sentenced to three years in a labour camp. The following document is taken from A Family Chronicle (to be published in English) by Vins, in which he describes the life of his family. He calls it "an ordinary chronicle of a normal Christian family, one of the many thousands in our country". In March this year Vins was re-arrested. RCL Vol 2, Nos. 4-5, pp. 37-38 published a letter from his four children, who fear for his life.

August 1966

The first weeks and months of imprisonment pass slowly by. Despite the very strict isolation of Lefortovo prison, a link between the Christian prisoners is gradually established and functions successfully. I know about almost all the believers who are held here. All are cheerful and steadfast in their trials for the faith. There are now about 30 of us in the prison. Some have already been sentenced. Some have already had meetings with their relatives. My relatives are alive and well: my mother was present at one of the trials. I am told that she was very sad. My darling mother.

Once again prison has visited you and I. Since you were 23 years old your life has been passed in the shadow of prisons and camps: first those of your

husband, now those of your son. You have borne many griefs and partings on the thorny path of Russian Christians. Do not be sad, my darling! Christ's victory is eternal! Christ is the Victor over death and hell, and even more over modern unbelief!

21 March, 1967

The convoy has lasted a week. We set off early in the morning. In the evening we arrived at a timber-felling camp named "Chapechanka". Here winter is still in full spate. There is snow in abundance. All around are the backwoods and the *taiga*. For tens of kilometres there is not even one village . . . This is the North.

Although it is rather late, I write my son a New Year poem which I composed during the journey. I also finish a poem for my daughter.

Swift reindeer, speed forth
From the far-away North,
Bear greetings to those I hold dear.
With God's love and the light
Of joy almost in sight,
Bear greetings to herald the New Year!

From the far-away North,
Swift reindeer, fly forth,
Greet those whom I love in the Lord!
And tell them this prisoner,
Who grimly must wander,
Is warmed by his love for the Word!

Through fierce northern tempest
Until heaven's sweet rest
The pathway by suffering is won!
And never forget those
Who are faith's great heroes
And living today, my dear son!

March-April 1967

Corrective Labour Camp "Chapechanka"

I noticed in the camp that the families of many of those who found themselves in prison would break up. You would see how first one man would receive an official divorce from his wife, and then another's wife would write that she was no longer waiting for him and had a new family. It was hard to watch the increasing spiritual suffering of these men.

Yes, it is certainly hard to live without the Lord. However, the example of faith and steadfastness of the wives of the Christian prisoners called forth the wonder and admiration of many prisoners. Even in their letters the believers' wives not only did not reproach their husbands with the increase of their family troubles in connection with their arrest, but, on the contrary, they encouraged them, and urged them to be faithful to the Lord until death. And when the wives of our prisoner brothers came to visit them in the distant northern camps, the whole camp and the entire guard used to talk about it, often with admiration.

In the "Chapechanka" camp in the northern Urals I spent three months together with two brothers in the faith, sentenced for confessing their faith in Christ. One of these brothers, Fyodor Vladimirovich Makhovitsky, a pastor of the Leningrad Evangelical Christian-Baptist Church, worked until his arrest as a metal-worker in the Kirov factory. The father of seven children, he was sentenced at the end of 1966 to two years in labour camp, and was sent off to the northern Urals. Immediately, within two weeks of brother Makhovitsky's arrival in the camp, his wife, Klavdia Alexandrovna, arrived from Leningrad for a meeting with him, and brought him a parcel. This was an unusual sight in the history of this northern camp lost in the midst of the Ural forests. On the whole it was relatives living near the Urals who came to visit the prisoners.

The other brother, a Circassian by nationality, was Konshaubi Bekirovich Dzhangetov, the father of six children. He was sentenced in the autumn of 1966 in the town of Cherkassk in the northern Caucasus to three years in labour camps. A former Muslim, he had come to faith in Christ at the age of nineteen. He had to endure much, and to bear the persecution of his unbelieving relatives. However, his faith in Christ did not weaken, but became even stronger and firmer. Now he was enduring new persecution, but this time from atheists.

I will not forget his joy and his fervent prayer of thanks to the Lord when his wife Tanya came to visit him in the North, having covered a distance of several thousand kilometres. There was no limit to his happiness. During brother Konshaubi's meeting with his wife, brother Fyodor Vladimirovich and I remained not far from the meeting-barracks, and our dear sister in the Lord Tanya waved her hand to us through the window and gave us a friendly smile. She was a true helpmate to her prisoner husband.

Within three months we were once more on the prisoners' trail. The reason for this was our Christian life in the camp. In the barracks where we lived, we three prayed openly by our plank beds. We talked just as openly about God with the people around us. The prisoners, and also the soldiers and secret police officers, showed great interest in setting us a number of questions: about the reason for our arrest, about our faith, about the Bible, about God. We tried to give thorough Christian answers to all these questions. Some of the prisoners stopped smoking and swearing, and even began to pray. All this greatly troubled not only the local camp authorities, but also Moscow.

The camp commandant once said among a group of officers, and it was reported to us: "Another six months and half the camp will become Baptists!" Of course he was greatly exaggerating, but the atheists' degree of alarm was very high. At the end of June 1967 a special commission from Moscow arrived in our distant *taiga* camp. In the most categorical way they forbade us to pray and to talk about God. But we could not submit to these demands. One of the brothers told the colonel who headed the commission: "We are unable not to pray and not to talk about God. This is our life. And if you have torn us away from our families and from our own homes and brought us to the North so that we would stop praying and believing – it won't happen. Even here we will pray by our bunks and we will serve our God!"

A few days later, on 6 July, brother Makhovitsky and I were sent off on a convoy. Brother Dzhangetov was left behind. We said farewell to our dear Konshaubi, and it was hard to part. Indeed, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity", especially in chains (Psalm 133, verse 1).