

Editorial

Should men be heroes in Czechoslovakia, or play safe and say "a decent bloke doesn't pretend to be a hero and doesn't insist on getting himself arrested"? This is how Vaclav Havel, the now imprisoned Czech playwright, scathingly summarized Ludvik Vaculik's attack on heroism (see *Index on Censorship*, Vol. 8, No. 5, pp. 39-42) contained in a *feuilleton* written in December 1978. Ludvik Vaculik is a Czech novelist and chief author of the famous manifesto, *Two Thousand Words*, on democratizing Czech society, published in 1968. Vaculik defends the actions of the unheroic—"every bit of honest work, every expression of incorruptibility, every gesture of good will"—for such "small deeds" can counteract the present subtle corrosion of Czechoslovak society. But, objects Havel defending those who do act heroically, those who have risked their necks are in prison because they tried to expose the general humiliation of the population.

The call to heroism is also being made within the Roman Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. Many Czech Catholics are disillusioned with their leaders who have not taken a strong stand in the struggle for human rights, and who have condemned the Charter 77 movement under pressure from the authorities. In this issue of *RCL* we publish some documents from Czechoslovakia (see pp. 44-53) which bring to light the dangerous plight of the Roman Catholic Church faced with internal division.

Vaclav Benda, a Roman Catholic philosopher and Charter 77 spokesman, recently sentenced (see *RCL*, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 249), feels that he must live by "the foolishness of God" and risk his neck. He feels compelled to shout out that "the Emperor has no clothes" although aware that Czechoslovakia's ills stem from the nature of the system, and therefore cannot be removed by piecemeal reform. Benda writes: "I am convinced that to be a fool or a child is the only way to the Kingdom of Heaven—unless you become like these little ones, you will not enter. The wisdom of this world is foolishness and its foolishness is wisdom—but in the present circumstances it is our only temporal political hope." Benda now faces four years in prison for his bravery.

Other Roman Catholics like Benda refuse to accept the limitations imposed upon them by the State. The many signatories of a letter to the Pope (see p. 47) in defence of 11 Catholics arrested last September, write that many believers are aware of their mission and therefore cannot be confined within the permitted boundaries. In this particular case those arrested had been printing unofficial literature.

The lack of trust in the Catholic hierarchy is due partly to the appointment of certain church leaders since 1968. According to Ivan Medek (see his letter, pp. 44-7) the State, wishing to improve its international standing, entered into negotiations with the Church and allowed a number of bishops to be appointed to some of the many vacant dioceses. But those appointed, Medek claims, enabled the State to increase its control over the Church and, unfortunately, the Vatican accepted these appointments. Now "relations between the laity and the official Church are non-existent". This disillusionment is further elaborated by Fr Zverina (see his letter, p. 48), a Jesuit priest and well-known Catholic theologian who lost his post at the Catholic Seminary of Litomerice in 1970. After the appearance of Charter 77 in January 1977, pressure was put on many groups within Czechoslovakia, including Christian denominations, to denounce the Chartists. The Synod of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren managed to ease their way out and avoided condemning the Charter. The Roman Catholic hierarchy, however, succumbed to pressure and published a "Declaration" in the Catholic newspaper, *Katolické Noviny*, denying any association with the Chartists. Fr Zverina is shocked at their pusillanimity: what is needed in Czechoslovakia is heroism, uncompromising speech, steadfastness. Instead the church leaders are taking the side of the powerful against the persecuted. He does not ask that the bishops should actually sign the Charter; all they had to do was refuse to sign the "Declaration".

Another document in this issue of *RCL* tries to define some of the ills in Czech society. Jan Tesar, an historian and signatory of Charter 77, sees a danger in the general loss of moral values. The new type of Czech citizen, or "new man", is indifferent to ideology and so vulnerable to manipulation from a totalitarian system which regards the individual as the State's property. The "new man" is materialistic and cynical. He has no clear convictions—he is simply a "vassal": "the 'new man' is the result of a 30-year struggle with religion, 30 years of manipulating schoolchildren, 30 years of systematically 'educating' people at every step and persuading them how inadvisable and quite unnecessary it is to meddle with the machinations of the powerful". In the face of such manipulation the stand taken by Czech citizens like the Chartists and dissident Roman Catholics seems all the more important. "Small deeds" like those advocated by Ludvik Vaculik are vital, but so is heroism.