

oners before his visit to Poland. While he seems to be taking an ambiguous stance on the missiles aimed at Poland threatening death to thirty-six million of his countrymen, his stance on the release of a few dozen people is quite unambiguous.

In the middle of May a group of Polish shipyard workers from Gdańsk lodged a strong protest concerning the government propaganda campaign against Lech Wałęsa and his parish priest, Father Henryk Jankowski. The letter, addressed to the Sejm (the Polish Parliament), defends Father Jankowski against press allegations that his father collaborated with the Germans during the war. It states:

Father Jankowski's support for the workers' struggle for human and civil rights and our pastor's refusal to obey the order to keep silent about the existence and activity of Solidarity have aroused the fury of the security forces [. . .] We hereby solemnly declare

that we shall oppose any insidious attempts to undermine our confidence in Lech Wałęsa and Father Henryk Jankowski and destroy their good name.

In an interview broadcast by Vatican Radio on 24 May, Archbishop Henryk Gulbinowicz of Wrocław, referring to the months of preparation for the Pope's visit, said:

These were months of experience and shock, times of trial and loyalty to the ideal of the Gospel, times of prayer, penance and hope. In assessing this period it should be said that all the experiences, calamities and sufferings which the Poles have gone through have been transformed into a time of exceptional national consolidation [. . .] This has been a time when we loved our neighbour in practice. I think that this has prepared us well for the visit of the Holy Father.

TADEUSZ KADENACY

Jesus Christ the Life of the World: The Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver 24 July-10 August 1983

The sixth assembly marked a further stage in the process of the integration of the Churches of Eastern Europe — and indeed of the Orthodox Churches — into the normal workings of the World Council of Churches. Previously the Orthodox often found it necessary to intervene "as Orthodox" and to establish their own point of view over against the emerging consensus. This time, they made their contribution — forcefully and skilfully — but as part of the whole and with many indications that for all their continuity of outward symbolism they have learnt a lot from the ecumenical movement and are receiving as well as giving. Similarly, we had no more of the self-conscious passport speeches from East European participants which have been a feature of earlier ecumenical events. It may well be that their governments and secretariats for religious affairs have also learnt something about the limits of acceptability in international discourse. This does not mean that official representatives of

churches are yet in a position to criticise their own governments — or indeed Churches — with the enthusiasm of the North Americans or the fervour of the Latin Americans. It does mean that they are noticeably reticent on many issues on which previously spokesmen like Bishop Bartha of Hungary might have been heard actively supporting their governments' policies; that they quietly vote for statements and resolutions on Central America and Southern Africa without actually joining in the attack on western iniquities; that they work away hard at committee stage to try to secure draft texts which they will not have to repudiate later; and that they are then prepared to defend what has been agreed.

This became clear when a draft statement on Afghanistan came before the Assembly. Compared with statements on Central America and Southern Africa for example it was short and reticent. In the debate speakers from Western Europe, America, Africa and Asia had no hesitation in saying

what they thought of Soviet involvement, and a bishop from Pakistan was particularly forthright. There is no doubt that the Soviet Union has lost any automatic support it may have had from the Third World by this adventure. An amendment to refer the report back was defeated; the Assembly clearly wanted to settle the matter itself. A Norwegian then moved the amendment, on which further debate centred, to strengthen the statement by changing the order of the conditions for a comprehensive settlement, to delete the reference to ending the supply of arms to opposition groups from outside and to add the word "immediate" to "the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan". In a keen debate the committee defended its draft on two grounds. First its recommendations summarised the resolutions of the UNO and the best hope of a solution at present is to support UN efforts. Secondly, it had as usual consulted the member Churches from the countries involved and was acting with their agreement. Representatives from churches in the USSR took up this theme and Archbishop Kirill warned of jeopardising common development and the future of the ecumenical fellowship. The draft resolution was an expression of the "political wisdom" of the WCC over the past years. This point weighed more heavily, I believe, than the point made by another speaker that people were ill-informed about the real situation and that the churches of the Soviet Union had information which would change people's minds. That information was not disclosed; and most delegates felt that they knew at least as much about Afghanistan as for example about Nicaragua. The amendment was defeated by 306 votes to 278 with 35 abstentions. It was a close-run thing. I am left wondering what would have been the effect of the amendment being passed. It would certainly have helped the image of the WCC in the west; it would have embarrassed the churches of the USSR; and it is impossible for us to tell whether the State would have exacted any penalty (after all the Churches put up a stout defence) or whether there would have been any serious long-term disruption of ecumenical fellowship. It is doubtful whether the statement, amended or not, will have any effect on the political situation in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, in the best tradition of Christian service, the WCC continues to help the Afghan refugees, estimated at over three

million.

The Assembly also produced a wide-ranging statement on Peace and Justice, with important sections on militarism and on nuclear weapons and disarmament. Attention in the West concentrates on those points where western nations and Churches feel challenged, but it is worth noting that the statements are of universal application and that the delegates from Eastern Europe have supported a statement which offers a considerable challenge to their own nations and Churches too. East German participants were particularly active in the quest for multilateral disarmament and for the convening of a Universal Peace Council by all the Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, in the near future. The sections on militarisation, "the promotion of hatred and prejudice", the abuse of the concept of "national security" and on the "rights of conscientious objectors" will be particularly helpful to them. There is a great sense of urgency in the section on nuclear disarmament. Several of the British delegates felt themselves unable to vote for the proposals, more I think from a sense of political realism than from any lack of urgency; and it is all the more remarkable, since the Soviet Union is a nuclear power, that the East European delegates supported such far-reaching statements as "... the Churches must unequivocally declare that the production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity".

The question of human rights has been maturing since the Nairobi Assembly, and a useful booklet *Human Rights on the Ecumenical Agenda* has recently been published. The Assembly issued a comprehensive statement on human rights which will repay careful study and can serve as a lever for action. There is explicit and strong support for religious freedom and it is said that the UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief "does not offer sufficient protection against specific problems facing religious communities today." The WCC and its member Churches are called upon "to identify gross violations of religious freedom and extend moral and material assistance to those who suffer oppression and even persecution because of their religious beliefs and practices." The Assembly supported the continuation of the WCC Human Rights Programme and the

strengthening of the Human Rights Advisory Group. "While recognising that East-West tensions are only part of the tragic divisions of humanity" it also welcomed "the work of the Churches' Human Rights Programme for the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, as a model of regional and inter-regional consultation and co-operation complementing and strengthening initiatives at world level." The opportunity is there for those who care about human rights and religious liberty to make this a strong feature of the WCC's work in the next few years.

The difficulty is that the WCC is dependent on its member Churches for raising specific cases; and it is much more difficult for Churches in Eastern Europe to do so than for churches in Western Europe and North America. Dr David Russell, a retiring member of the Central Committee, had been tirelessly working away on this range of issues at every level of the Assembly and he made this point explicitly in plenary. "Can we lift a little bit more that veil of silence on religious liberty which hangs over our conversations. For example, Albania . . . but Albania does not stand alone. There are other countries with atheist regimes also represented here. The council and its member Churches should bring these matters out into the open." His plea for the championing of religious freedom brought applause — and no one gainsaid it. Olle Engström from Sweden made a similar point — possibly out of order — during the debate on programme guidelines. He contrasted the large amount of analysis of the problems of the First and Third Worlds with virtual silence on the Second World, and appealed to the Churches themselves to raise the issues.

There was a particularly lively and well-attended press conference on Human Rights where again Dr Russell was illuminating on the respective merits of quiet diplomacy and public protest. He showed how both had worked together to help the Siberian Seven. The All-Union Baptist Church and the Russian Orthodox Church leadership had supported the efforts of the WCC and the "representations of the Russian Orthodox Church to government authorities over several years on this matter (were) gratefully recalled" in a message to Metropolitan Filaret.

While the Assembly was in session an appeal to the World Council of Churches

with copies to the Archbishop of Canterbury and others was transmitted via Keston College from Deacon Vladimir Rusak, formerly employed in the editorial offices of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. Deacon Rusak wrote not only of his own dismissal and the difficulties involved in the projected publication in the West of his book on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church since 1917, but also more generally of the difficulties of believers in the Soviet Union. He particularly wanted the WCC to be aware of the hopes and aspirations of Russian Christians beyond those which would be expressed by the official delegation. This appeal was not brought on to the agenda of the Assembly itself and, indeed, it is difficult to see how it could have been; but the Archbishop of Canterbury raised the issues both directly with the Russian delegation and in an interview with Rosemary Hartill of the BBC. An assurance was given that the matter would be taken up in the normal course of WCC business and Mrs Jean Mayland, a Church of England delegate and member both of the Central Committee and of the Assembly Business Committee spoke to it in plenary to ensure that it would not disappear from sight. There was thus no repetition of the "bear-hunt" at Nairobi, when the letter from Yakunin and Regelson led to a special hearing on dissidence and religious liberty. The case of Deacon Rusak will prove an interesting test of the WCC's procedures for dealing with matters of this kind as outlined by Erich Weingärtner and Ninan Koshy of the Churches' Commission on International Affairs at the press conference on Human Rights, but it is neither straightforward nor cut-and-dried, involving as it does a dispute between an individual and his own Church. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury, for all his forthrightness, avoided being drawn directly into that; and it would be quite unconstitutional as well as undiplomatic for the World Council of Churches to clash publicly with a member Church over an individual grievance. It is more realistic to look for slow progress on the wider issues which Deacon Rusak raises, with the WCC taking the way of discretion and others the way of valour.

There are some, however, whose valour is so indiscreet as to prove a hindrance to those of us who care for religious freedom in Eastern Europe. The Assembly was somewhat marred by the activities of a number of

protesting groups who picketed the main public event in the Pacific Coliseum and reappeared intermittently on the campus where the Assembly was housed. They were mostly fundamentalist groups such as that led by Pastor Jack Glass from Glasgow and Carl McIntyre's International Council of Christian Churches. They were not well-briefed. I saw one poster saying "Thiemmen was appointed by the KGB". I asked the protester who Thiemmen was. He didn't know. I think he must have meant Pimen. Another protester, when asked for evidence of his assertions, replied "I don't know. They gave me five bucks to stand here". Protest at this level of ignorance and incompetence helps no one. The most bizarre and well-financed group was The Club of Life, simultaneously supporting the economic theories and political ambitions of Lyndon H. La Rouche, advocating beam weapons, contending for the *Filioque*, warning against the pretensions of Moscow as the Third Rome and maintaining, in contrast to others, that it is the KGB which is a tool of the Russian Orthodox Church, not the other way round. Rather flatteringly, it claimed in an open appeal that only the Anglican Church could save the situation. Crude dirty tricks, like impersonation, caricature and the issuing of forged documents, did nothing for the reputation of the fringe which was treated with bemused tolerance by the majority of delegates. The true interests of believers in Eastern Europe

were not furthered by the demonstrations at Vancouver and I came away more than ever convinced that bodies like Keston College must steer clear of the hatred, bigotry and lunacy of groups like these, while continuing to concentrate on hard evidence and verifiable facts.

By contrast the Geneva-based Christian Solidarity International, which held a conference on the Persecuted Church in Vancouver during the Assembly, sought and found discussion rather than confrontation. Its president, the Revd Hans Stückelberger, met Philip Potter, the General Secretary of the WCC, and presented a petition containing 15,500 signatures of European churchmen asking the WCC to take concrete measures in demanding freedom of faith, not only in communist countries but also in Latin America, Egypt and South Africa.

There is still much to be hoped for in co-operation with the World Council of Churches, particularly now that religious freedom is back on the agenda. The real challenge is to member Churches. We must leave to the judgement of the churches in Eastern Europe themselves whether the time really is ripe "to lift the veil of silence" and we must encourage our Churches to back financially and in other ways the Human Rights programmes which our representatives have asked for.

J. R. ARNOLD

The Yakunin Hearing: A Call for Solidarity

Disarmament, women's rights, dialogue with other faiths (Hinduism, Islam, etc.), the general struggle for human rights, hunger and poverty — few were surprised when these issues dominated the proceedings and action of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) when it convened 24 July in Vancouver. However, the absence of significant action dealing with persecution, oppression or the state-imposed suffering which, according to reliable estimates is a reality for almost half of Christendom, sent waves of dismay and concern through many quarters.

Christians in the Soviet Union reacted when the persecuted and suffering Church was not included as a major agenda item; several protest letters reached assembly delegates. Meanwhile, in Vancouver, the

Zürich-based organisation Christian Solidarity International (CSI) challenged the WCC to examine fully and act upon the persecution issue and its implications for Christians today. As part of a conference named after imprisoned Russian Orthodox priest Gleb Yakunin, CSI brought fourteen authorities on the subject to Vancouver.

One of the letters reaching WCC delegates came from the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR, a group formed by Yakunin. The communiqué basically reinforced a letter written by Yakunin and Lev Regelson and addressed to the WCC's Fifth Assembly which met in Nairobi in 1975. Yakunin's appeal was never fully acted upon by the WCC, according to CSI and many observers.