

Chronicle

Czechoslovakia's New Bishops

The news that three new Catholic bishops were to be appointed in Czechoslovakia came on 27 April. A third round of talks between the Vatican and Prague had ended ten days earlier and with no date set for their resumption, there was speculation that some form of agreement had been reached. Confirmation of this came in an interview given to Radio Prague by Vladimír Janku, Director of the government secretariat for Church Affairs. He disclosed that his government had approved the appointment of two auxiliary bishops for Prague and one apostolic administrator for Trnava, Slovakia.

It was not until 18 May that CTK (Czechoslovak Press Agency) revealed the names of these new bishops. Cardinal Tomášek's assistants in Prague were to be Antonín Liška (Canon of St Vitus Cathedral) and Jan Lebeda (Vicar General of Prague). Ján Sokol (Apostolic Administrator of Trnava) was to be raised to the status of bishop but to carry on as apostolic administrator.

The nomination of 54-year-old Sokol came as no great surprise to Catholics in the archdiocese of Trnava. Weeks before the announcement they had been quietly confident that Ján Sokol would be their next bishop. Indeed, publicity leaflets for the Šaštín pilgrimage (21-22 May) bearing the bold announcement that

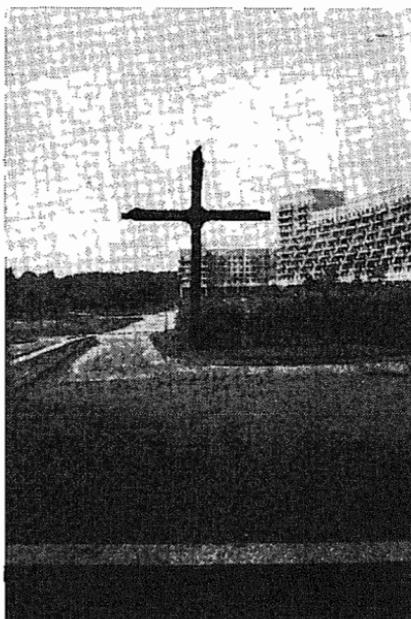
"His Eminence, Bishop Ján Sokol" would be celebrating Mass there had been in circulation as early as the first week of May.

A product of the Bratislava seminary, Sokol worked in various Slovak parishes after his ordination in 1951. In 1968 he became prefect of the seminary and last November, following the death of Bishop Gabriš, took over temporarily as administrator of Trnava. This position was made permanent in December when the state finally gave its approval. There can be no doubting Ján Sokol's popularity in Slovakia. A week after his nomination had been announced huge crowds gathered at Šaštín to welcome the new bishop. On 12 June thousands assembled at St John the Baptist Cathedral, Trnava, to witness Sokol's consecration. Afterwards many of them walked with him through the streets of Trnava to his bishop's residence.

What is not yet clear is whether the two new Czech bishops enjoy the same degree of popularity. Jan Lebeda, at 75 the oldest of the three, is known as a theologian and historian. Ordained in 1937, Lebeda has spent fifty years in pastoral service, ten of these at the Prague seminary where he was Spiritual Director. In 1980 he rose to the rank of Canon of Prague and in 1983 became Vicar General. Lebeda is perhaps best



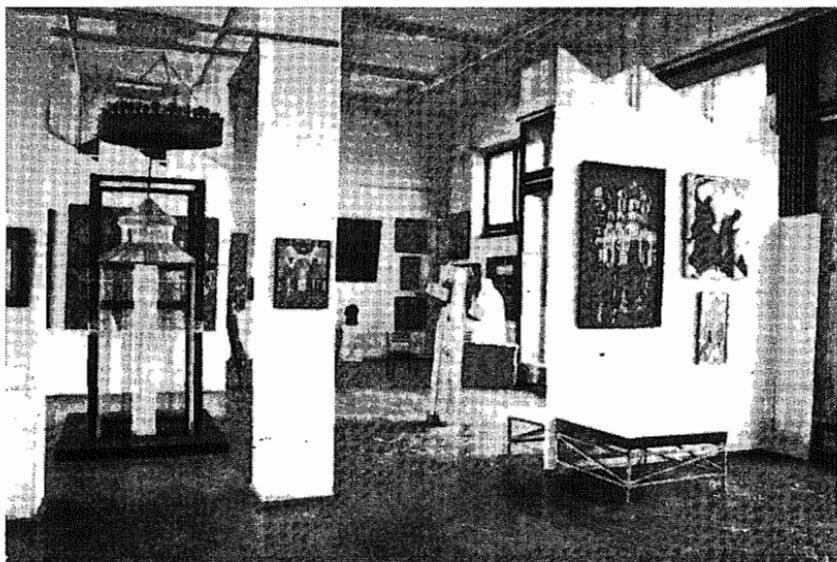
A poster advertising the exhibition.



An outdoor exhibit.

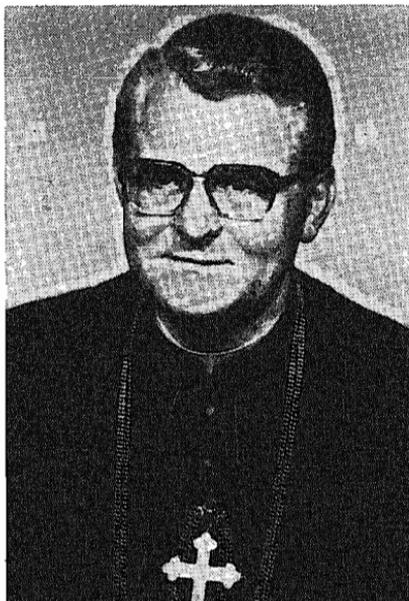
Unofficial Art Exhibition.
(Photos courtesy James Stark)

The Leningrad-based Association of Experimental Art held an exhibition in July dedicated to the millennium of the baptism of Rus'. The works were exhibited of thirty artists who "identify themselves within the context of Russian Orthodox traditions". Although the A.E.A. is an unofficial organisation, it was granted premises for the exhibition in a Leningrad suburb.





The University Church of St John the Baptist, Trnava, where Ján Sokol was consecrated on 12 June. (Photo courtesy Keston College)



Bishop Ján Sokol, Apostolic Administrator of Trnava, Slovakia. (Photo © Anton Hlinka)

See *Chronicle* item on pp. 352-54.

Rev. Miloš Rejchrt and family. See *Document* on pp. 365-67. (Photo courtesy Keston College)



known for his association with the Czech Catholic weekly *Katolické Noviny*. He held the post of censor on the paper's editorial board, but stood down in 1982, the year the Pope outlawed *Pacem in Terris*, the government-backed association of clergy. In leaving *Katolické Noviny*, Lebeda severed his links with *Pacem in Terris*, which then, as now, controlled the Catholic press. Now Lebeda's loyalty is wholly to the church. In a recent interview with the newspaper *Lidová Democracie* he states that he regards it as his "most basic duty [as a bishop] to ensure that parishes are filled and priests well-trained."

From Prague's point of view, the choice of Antonin Liška as bishop seemed an unlikely one. In 1950, religious orders in Czechoslovakia were all but banned, many were forcibly dissolved, and all were prohibited from accepting new members. Liška trained in a Redemptorist order in the 1940s, and in 1951 was secretly ordained and admitted to the order. Liška's ordination is a hopeful sign that the religious orders in Czechoslovakia may have their legal status returned, a possibility made more real by the fact that nuns are now being allowed to work openly for the first time in twenty years.

The new episcopal appointments mark a turning-point in church-state relations in Czechoslovakia. For 15 years no bishops had been consecrated, and all negotiations between Prague and the Vatican foundered on the criterion of loyalty to the state. The Czechoslovak authorities insisted that new bishops belong to *Pacem in Terris*. As a result, ten out of 13 dioceses were vacant at the start of 1988. Now it seems that the Vatican has won the battle over *Pacem in Terris*, as none of these new bishops is a member. The latest appointments have brought the num-

ber of vacant bishoprics to nine, and hopes are high that agreement will be reached on yet more bishops.

Nevertheless, if this is a victory for the Vatican, it is a modest one. Six months of negotiation with Prague have resulted in agreement on only three candidates to serve in just two archdioceses. Moreover, two of the three are auxiliaries without full powers, and the third is not a residential bishop. Clearly the Vatican wished for a great deal more. Negotiations have so far failed to agree upon a bishop for the archdiocese of Olomouc in Moravia. The Czechoslovak negotiating team is thought to have pressed for the nomination of Dr František Vymětal, dean of the Litoměřice theological faculty. But as chairman of *Pacem in Terris* he was unacceptable to Rome.

However, Catholics in Olomouc have not yet given up hope. Since Good Friday groups have been meeting in the Cathedral there to pray for a bishop who would be faithful to God. The Olomouc Catholics can take heart from the success of other recent initiatives by believers. This year's 31-point Catholic petition and religious freedom vigil in Bratislava certainly drew nationwide attention to the need for new bishops. They also unified Catholics and gave them the courage to voice their demands. The government is now beginning to recognise that policies which alienate the country's six million believers are counterproductive, especially at a time when economic reforms require the support of as many elements of society as possible. As Matej Lucan, the deputy prime minister, told CTK on 20 May: "Believers have an active part to play in restructuring." He affirmed his government's wish to resolve other church issues in the same "spirit of good will" manifest in the negotiations over new bishops. Likely areas for attention are the problems of enrolling children for

religious education, and the general shortage of religious literature.

Bishop Sokol said at his consecration that the church in Czechoslovakia was entering a new era. "I am convinced", he said, "that this was the first step and that many more steps will be taken." With progress made over the important question of

the bishops, there must now be real hope of meaningful change in other areas. Catholics in Czechoslovakia will be hoping that Bishop Sokol's conviction proves to be correct.

*Compiled by members of
Keston College staff*

The Pope at Trausdorf

Over 80,000 Catholics from Central Europe attended a mass said by Pope John Paul II at Trausdorf, Burgenland on 24 June of this year, the first full day of the papal five-day tour of Austria. The mass at Trausdorf was intended to give the Pope an opportunity to speak directly to pilgrims from the communist countries of the region which have not yet been able to share Poland's experience of a papal visit. Trausdorf was chosen as the venue of the papal appearance because it lies near to Austria's borders with Hungary and Czechoslovakia and formerly belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary. (Indeed, before the end of the First World War, present day Hungary, Slovakia, Transylvania, Croatia, Voivodina and Burgenland were drawn together under the Holy Crown of St Stephen.) Among the prelates concelebrating the Mass were the Hungarian Primate, Cardinal László Paskai, the Croatian Primate, Cardinal Franjo Kuharić and the newly-consecrated bishop of Trnava in Slovakia, Ján Sokol. The Pope read messages in Hungarian, Slovak, Croatian and Polish. The Mass was broadcast live by Austrian television, which can be received in the border regions of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia.

The reactions of the Czechoslovak and the Hungarian authorities to the

Pope's approach to their Catholic citizens contrasted sharply. Both governments wish to prevent the Catholic Church from acting as an independent force in public life but whereas the Hungarian authorities seek to achieve this mainly by means of a political alliance with the church, their Czechoslovak counterparts are inclined to use repression. The Hungarian hierarchy was allowed to organise transport to Trausdorf for over 50,000 Catholics in cooperation with a state travel agency. Special arrangements were made for five hundred handicapped pilgrims. Hungary's secular and religious press provided extensive coverage of the event. The Czechoslovak authorities, on the other hand, refused to grant exit visas to those wishing to travel to Trausdorf. In the event only two hundred Czechs and Slovaks were present to see the Pope, and most of them concealed their intention to attend the Mass by applying for visas to visit relatives in the West. The announcement of the presence of Bishop Sokol at the Mass was greeted with great applause in recognition of the obstacles experienced by would-be Czech and Slovak pilgrims.

Pope John Paul's message at Trausdorf was devoid of controversial political themes. He did, however, emphasise the close and