

CS(S)R

POWERLESS TRADE UNIONS IN A WORKERS' STATE

(Brussels/FCI) Soviet bloc regimes rarely allow the publication of criticism of institutions which they control, such as the trade unions, but a number of letters to the editors recently published in Czechoslovak newspapers openly divulge the fact that the so-called trade unions have no power to protect the workers against the management. Such letters were published in several daily papers: "Nova Svoboda", Ostrava; "Prace, Prague; and "Lidove Demokracie", Prague.

POWERFUL MANAGERS: A worker in a Moravian factory, himself a member of its works council, complained that following the recent economic reform in the country, the powers of management were considerably increased while those of the trade unions were diminished even more. Another worker complained that the activities of the trade unions were in fact limited to the distribution of places in holiday homes and the convening of meetings where practically nothing was settled. A mineworker openly declared that the trade union officials were to a great degree dependent on the management and that they were unable to defend the workers' interests because they had to remain in the good books of the manager. (See also item No. 92)

EXPENSIVE LIVING: A woman shopworker complained that three-fifths of the joint earnings of her husband and herself, that is 1,500 crowns out of a monthly total of 2,500, are spent on food for them and their two children. Another woman writes that over two-thirds of her husband's wage, i.e. 1,000 out of 1,800 crowns monthly, was spent on food in her budget. An agricultural worker complained that state farm workers earned only 1,380 crowns per month while collective farm workers only 1,018 crowns. The average wage of an industrial worker is 1,463 crowns per month. It is generally accepted that a budget which devotes a high proportion of its income to the purchase of food is a clear indication of low living standards of the family concerned. (87/ICFTU)

PRAGUE REGIME UNEASY ABOUT CARDINAL BERAN

(Vienna/FCI) The Czechoslovak authorities are apparently becoming increasingly sensitive to outside opinion about their religious policies. In March, at a peak evening listening hour, Prague Radio replied to a listener in Drogheda, Eire, who had asked why Cardinal Beran, Archbishop of Prague, had been exiled. He was not exiled, the commentator protested; he went to live in Rome at his own request when he was appointed cardinal, which as the cardinal himself stated before is not true.

"Some newspapers in the West have greatly magnified the whole case of Cardinal Beran and ... have tried to prove that there is no religious freedom in this country", the commentator added. After the Communists seized power in February, 1948, Archbishop Beran had refused to take an oath of allegiance to the new regime - "a condition for the performance of all Church offices". He was therefore barred from officiating. However, he was allowed to live in a villa in the country, "enjoying to the full his rights and freedoms". (This did not include the right to receive visitors, and for years it was not known whether he was alive or dead.)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: Prague Radio in its African service defended the Communist countries' claims to tolerate religion recently. Many people throughout the world, it said, "try to make you believe that there is no such thing as religious freedom in Socialist countries, and that people are persecuted for even practising their religion". Yet it was enough to see the "thousands" of churches open throughout Czechoslovakia, visited by people of all ages and social groups. "It could not be otherwise, because religious freedom is fully guaranteed by the constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic". Of course, alongside the right to practise religion, the Communist State also permitted the right to advocate atheism. "This is in harmony with democratic principles, which permit the competitive battle of ideas.

IMPASSE: Talks between the Vatican and the Czechoslovak authorities seem to have reached an impasse. The talks were dragging because some of Prague's conditions were unacceptable in Rome. The main difficulties were that Dr. Josef Plojhar, an excommunicated priest, was proposed as CS(S)R's negotiator, and that the Prague authorities were still insisting that their "peace" priests be nominated to vacant bishoprics, while the Vatican could not approve the nomination of bishops who were tools of the Prague government. On the other hand it was difficult to find candidates of courage and independence who were not automatically regarded as "enemies of the regime". (90/KP/Mon/R)