

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Speaker, all the criticisms of my colleague deal with a situation which was exactly the same under the Liberal Party before the election of the Conservatives in 1984. In an organization where the Government had spent enormous amounts of money, there was even a prohibition against campaigning for Conservative candidates, but not for the Liberals. Is this Liberal justice? Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for York West does not have the real version of the facts. However, he is new here and he will learn.

● (1820)

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS—VIOLATIONS IN U.S.S.R.

Mr. Andrew Witer (Parkdale—High Park): Mr. Speaker, on November 4, the review of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe opens in Vienna. The Vienna CSCE review will assess compliance with all aspects of the Helsinki Final Act by the 35 signatory states and, further, will consider any new commitments the signatories may wish to undertake.

I thank the Minister for his comments in reply to my question in the House last week regarding the review. I am pleased with his assurance that Canada will continue to press the U.S.S.R. for compliance with the accords.

This month my colleagues in the Parliaments of France, the United States, Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria, and other countries are taking part in a co-ordinated effort by the International Parliamentary Group for Human Rights in the Soviet Union to focus attention on Soviet performance in respect of human rights agreements. One of the most basic of those rights is freedom of religious practice. A summary of the reality of religious life in Soviet-dominated nations quickly leads one to understand the importance of Canada and other countries taking a firm position on the issue.

Under Basket 1, Principal V11 of the Helsinki Final Act, the Soviet Union pledged to "recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practice, alone or in community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience". The reality is that the U.S.S.R. attempts to control all facets of religious life and to discourage belief among its citizens.

There are approximately 100 million religious believers in the Soviet Union representing major world religions, yet the only religious activity officially recognized by the Soviet Constitution is the freedom to conduct religious ceremonies in officially registered churches. The constitutionally guaranteed separation of church and state is interpreted to mean that the church has no say in state matters. However, the state retains total control over religious life through the Council for Religious Affairs, a government watch-dog body. The state maintains control over places of worship by enforcing registration requirements. All religious leaders and literature must be approved by the state, and access to seminaries is strictly limited. There is an absolute ban on religious education and

charitable and relief works by religious communities. Believers are widely discriminated against in education, employment, and housing. Moreover, whole denominations such as the Uniate or Ukrainian Catholic Church and Jehovah's Witnesses are outlawed.

Individuals who are tried and imprisoned for their religious activities are charged under articles of the Criminal Code, an example being a charge of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda or slandering of the Soviet state. This allows Soviet officials to claim that no one in the Soviet Union is imprisoned for religious beliefs. Recently new Soviet legislation was introduced which made it possible to rearrest prisoners just prior to the date of their release, thus "legally" extending their sentences. In 1986, prisoners such as Sergei Khodorovich and Nikolai Baturin were rearrested just prior to the date of their release. Baturin is now serving his third consecutive sentence in a labour camp. The number of people imprisoned for religious activities has nearly doubled since 1979. These prisoners of conscience are incarcerated in prisons, labour camps, and psychiatric hospitals.

The Minister asked me to advise him of any particular examples of violations of religious freedom which I would like to see raised in Vienna. The unconscionable suppression of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the U.S.S.R. is a primary case in point. The church has some four million followers, yet it has been outlawed and forced to become part of the Russian Orthodox Church which is under state control. Despite harsh repression and persecution, the Catholic Church in Ukraine is still active underground.

● (1825)

The late Cardinal Slipyj, the Church's legendary head, spent 18 years in labour camps before being allowed to leave the country. Not long ago, Josyp Terelya, was sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment. He has already spent a total of 18 years in prison for his religious activities.

The treatment of the Ukrainian Catholic Church under the Soviet Government is a clear violation of the Helsinki agreements. I will be pleased to supply the Minister with specific cases and names of individuals who have been imprisoned as a result of Soviet policy.

My colleagues in IPG and I believe that religious freedom and other issues in Soviet human rights performance must remain squarely on the agenda at the Vienna Review Conference. The democratic signatories to the Helsinki Final Act must strengthen their support for human rights in the Soviet Union. Further, the democracies must insist that there be balanced progress in all areas.

Any new agreements in military, security and economic relations reached in Vienna must be accompanied by similar accords in human rights and by guarantees of performance under existing agreements. Suppression of religion, and discrimination against individuals following their conscience in defiance of dictates of the Soviet state are well documented,