

magazine from Keston College summarizing that institution's most recent information about Adventists in Russia. The final item in the cluster is a letter by General Conference President Neal Wilson (Oct. 31, 1979) communicating the position of denominational leadership regarding the divided Adventist community in the Soviet Union.

The central figure in the story here being told is, of course, Vladimir Shelkov. His recent death at 84 in a Soviet concentration camp attracted the outraged notice of numerous publications, among them, for example, the evangelical weekly, *Christianity Today*, and the Catholic journal *Commonweal*, whose biting editorial (Sept. 26, 1980) expressed as much admiration for Shelkov as disdain for his persecutors. From what we now know, it appears that Shelkov was a figure of compelling authority, stubborn conviction

and resolute, even defiant, courage. More remains, of course, to be learned about him — not least of all about the degree of his doctrinal orthodoxy — but for the present it seems clear that his was a special kind of Adventist life, special even in a nation where other Adventist leaders, among them M. P. Kulakov, have also suffered imprisonment for their faith. Shelkov's ways — though no doubt of ambiguous merit, as are the ways of every mortal — nonetheless afford our community an opportunity to assess itself against the exceptional standard of one who, through all his days of trial and adventure, remained, in some sense at least, a sharer of the Adventist way. It is with this theological point in mind, as well as a concern for historical clarity, that we now publish these materials.

—The Editors

Shelkov and the True and Free Adventists

by Marite Sapiets

The recent death in a Soviet labour camp of 84-year-old Vladimir Shelkov, leader of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists, has highlighted the activities of this small Christian sect in the USSR. Although it was known in the West that it existed as a body separated from the officially recognized Adventist Church — it is periodically attacked in the Soviet anti-religious press — it was only in the 1970s that True and Free Adventist *samizdat* documents began to reach the West. Certain facts soon became clear from a study of these documents: there was an unofficial press, *True*

Witness, run by the True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists as a centrally-organized group; and a large number of documents, pamphlets and articles, even books, were being produced by this “publishing house” and distributed all over the USSR (as proved by the lists of material confiscated by the KGB during searches of Adventist homes as far apart as Riga and Samarkand). In fact, owing to the information provided in these documents about the history and doctrines of the True and Free Adventists, more is now known about them than about the “official” Adventists, who have no publication of their own. Even Soviet press articles tend to con-

centrate on attacking the “reformist” Adventist sect and largely ignore the registered Adventists, apart from pointing out that they have “realistically assessed their position.”¹

The split between the official Adventists and the True and Free Remnant took place as far back as 1924–28. The Adventist Church developed in the USA after 1844 and was officially founded in 1863, as a result of the apocalyptic visions and prophecies of Ellen White.² It has existed in the territories of the Russian Empire since the 1880s. Under the Tsars, as later under the Soviet regime, certain key Adventist doctrines led to conflict with the State: strict observance of the Sabbath day (Saturday), on which no work could be done, and refusal to bear arms or swear a military oath. The loyal greeting sent to Emperor Nicholas II by the All-Russian Council of Seventh-Day Adventists in 1905, after its legalization as a non-Orthodox denomination, is a carefully worded document (though always quoted by Soviet sources as an example of Adventist reactionary attitudes): it promises to render to the Tsar whatever is “Caesar’s” — taxes, tributes, fear and honour — while giving God “what is God’s”.³ The pre-revolutionary period is seen by True and Free Adventists, especially by V. A. Shelkov himself, as one of persecution by “state Orthodoxy” (“*gospravoslaviye*”) — a parallel to the later Soviet “state atheism” (“*gosateizm*”). Such persecution abated after 1905 but came to a head again after the declaration of war in 1914, when the first split occurred between Adventists who were prepared to swear the military oath and thus declare their loyalty to the Russian State, and those who refused. Shelkov refers to the former group with disapproval in his article *A Recurrence of Misanthropy*, quoting loyal statements issued by “false Adventists” in both Russia and Germany in 1914 and drawing a parallel with the 1924 declaration of loyalty to the Soviet government by the “official” Adventists.⁴ The central issue in all cases is not the legitimacy of the government in question, but the infringement of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” by Adventists who were prepared to take up arms in defence of the State.

The All-Russian Council of Adventists left the problem to individual conscience, while encouraging Adventists to serve in medical and construction units, as they were allowed to do in many cases.

The period looked on most favourably by all Adventists is that between 1918 and 1924, when the Soviet government was still allowing evangelization by non-Orthodox sects and in some cases encouraging the concept of “Christian socialism”. The Adventists doubled their numbers, rising from 6,085 in 1916 to 12,697 in 1926,⁵ and were allowed to publish two newspapers, *Voice of Truth* (*Golos istiny*) and *Good News* (*Blagovestnik*). During this period both the Constitution of 1918 and the Decree on the Separation of Church and State were still in force. These allowed “religious propaganda” (as well as “anti-religious propaganda”) and “private” religious education. In 1929, the clause on “religious propaganda” was deleted and the Law on Religious Associations was passed, forbidding the teaching of religion by anyone except parents. The Decree issued by Lenin on 4 January 1919, allowing exemptions from military service on religious grounds, remained in force until 1926, and is the main reason for the special place given to Lenin in modern Adventist *samizdat*. Shelkov, for example, quotes approvingly Lenin’s words, “let us adopt this decree to calm down and satisfy those who have already borne dreadful torments and persecution from the Tsarist government”.⁶ The Adventist leader justified his own practice of living “underground” on a false passport by reference to Lenin’s example under the Tsarist regime. Lenin’s actual view of the Protestant sects as “a new, purified, refined poison for the oppressed masses”⁷ is not referred to.

It is doubtful whether the 1924–28 schism between the two groups of Adventists took place only over the issue of declaring loyalty to the Soviet State, as is often implied by Soviet atheist authors such as F. Fedorenko and A. Belov. “Gratitude and sincere support” was indeed expressed to V. I. Lenin, his close associates and “the only progressive government in the world” by the Fifth All-

Union Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists in 1924; but limited loyalty to “Caesar” and the authorities “instituted by God” (as in Tsarist times) had never been denied by Adventists. The official argument put forward by A. Demidov, editor of *Voice of Truth* (see *RCL* Vol. 5, No. 2, 1977, pp. 88-93), was that the Adventists must stress the things that united them with the “builders of the new social order”, not those that divide them from the new society. Adventism could still win toleration from the atheist regime by joining with communism to reorganize society and condemning the injustices of capitalism, imperialism and the established Churches of the West. Demidov’s article “The Voice of the Protestant West” is almost the only substantial account of the “official” Adventist viewpoint in 1924, but it is available only in the form of extracts in books by

ice: Adventists were at first (1924) encouraged by the All-Union Council to serve in the army according to individual conscience, then (1928) declared subject to conscription on the same terms as other citizens. Shelkov states that the more complete 1928 surrender of principle was then back-dated for *post-factum* inclusion in the 1924 statement, after which those Adventists who had expressed their opposition all along (led by G. Ostvald) were expelled from the Congress.

This “remnant” are the “True and Free” Adventists, as they describe themselves: “True”, because they are true to God’s fourth and sixth Commandments, thus following the example of the early Christians (Shelkov even quotes the Church Fathers Origen and Tertullian in support of Christian refusal to bear arms); “Free”, because they are free from what they see as slavish subservience to the state atheist dictatorship imposed by registration of their communities (which thus bear “the mark of the beast”, as in Revelation 14:16). The “Beast” is identified by V. A. Shelkov in his writings with the principle of state religion or state atheism as such, wrongly made use of in the past by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and now incarnate in the materialist atheist “religion” of the Soviet State. Shelkov contrasts this “impure State” with his ideal of the “pure State”, in which faith and religious expression are left to individuals and voluntary religious organizations, while state power is confined to maintaining peace and law and order.

The official Adventists gained little from their compromise: by the end of the 1920s their journals were closed down and evangelization became illegal; in the 1930s the Leningrad congregation and almost all Adventist communities were dissolved and most Adventist leaders were arrested, although the central All-Union Council remained officially in existence. After a revival during the religious “thaw” of the Second World War and the post-war period, the All-Union Council was abolished by Khrushchev during the anti-religious campaign of the 1960s. Some official Adventist leaders, such as A. Demidov, have spent as many as 20 years in prison.

“The True and Free Adventists have been savagely persecuted since the 1920s, . . . partly because of their pacifism and their stubborn insistence on refusing to work or attend school on Saturdays.”

atheist authors⁸ who quote only those passages which confirm the points they themselves wish to make and who avoid specifying the precise points of conflict between the “official” Adventists and the “reformist” groups. The real disagreements, as outlined by V. A. Shelkov in *A Recurrence of Misanthropy* and in *The Struggle of the All-Union Church of Time and Free Seventh-Day Adventists for Freedom of Conscience in the USSR*, were apparently over basic Adventist doctrines (strict Sabbath observance and military service) and registration of Adventist communities by the State. It seems clear, from both V. A. Shelkov and the atheist writer A. Belov, that the official Adventist All-Union Council, fearing to lose its limited state recognition and its journals, agreed to compromises over the question of military serv-

By 1964 the “official” Adventists had increased their numbers significantly since the 1920s⁹ and were successfully conducting evangelization among younger people. Children were being taught in groups and Adventist services were often extended to include a period of Bible study. Pamphlets explaining Adventist doctrines and using scientific facts to support Biblical texts were circulated unofficially and passed on to non-Adventists. Similar activities were going on in most of the Protestant churches and were resented by the Soviet authorities as an infringement of the law against religious propaganda. Khrushchev’s campaign against the churches was in part an attempt to end such “violations”. Instead, as among the Baptists and Pentecostals, it gave rise to a split between Adventists who were willing to submit to government demands to keep their registration permit and Adventists who preferred to form “unregistered” congregations and continue their church activities without official sanction. In January 1965, at a conference held in Kiev, 180 Adventist leaders (led by P. Matsanov) founded a new central body, the Council of Elder Brethren, which rejected the “official” Adventist leadership (led by A. F. Parasei) and began to ordain its own evangelists.¹⁰ This “reformist” group seems to have merged with the True and Free Adventists of the 1920s, advocating “separation from the world” (i.e. the Soviet State) and organizing its church life — services, children’s groups, charitable activities and Bible classes — without seeking registration. The “unofficial” Adventists also seem to have established links with unregistered congregations of Pentecostals and Baptists.

The state-registered Adventists exist as individual communities but often have to share a “prayer-house” with a registered Baptist congregation. It is grudgingly conceded by the Soviet press that they have even increased the number of their young people — for example, from 25.2 per cent (1967) to 32.7 per cent (1977) in parts of Moldavia.¹¹ Occasional defectors from the True and Free Adventists returning to the “official” flock are given publicity by the press — for example, T. I. Chertkov, who wrote a letter to his

brothers and sisters urging them to return to “official” Adventism.¹²

The True and Free Adventists have been savagely persecuted since the 1920s, partly because of their success in maintaining their own central All-Union Council and an independent press (established on organized lines by V. A. Shelkov in 1968), partly because of their pacifism and their stubborn insistence on refusing to work or attend school on Saturdays. About half of the known Adventist prisoners of conscience have been imprisoned for refusing to bear arms or swear the military oath, although many have declared their readiness to serve in medical and construction units (not on Saturdays however).

Like other banned religious groups (the True Orthodox and Uniates, for example), the True and Free Adventists were arrested *en masse* during the 1930s and 1940s as members of an “anti-Soviet organization”. Two of their leaders, G. Ostvald and P. I. Manzhura, died in prison, “cheerful and unbowed in spirit”, though “exhausted and tormented”. V. A. Shelkov himself, ordained as a preacher in 1929, served three sentences (totalling 23 years) in camps and prisons: 1931-34 in the Urals, 1945-54 in Karaganda and 1957-67 in the camps of the Far East, Siberia and Mordovia, “in conditions of violence, barbarity and horror, which cannot be described in words”.¹³ Avraam Shifrin, a Jewish fellow-prisoner, wrote of the impression made on him by Shelkov in Siberia: the guards pushed into their cell “a tall, thin man about 60 years old, with an intense, expressive face, framed by a long, white beard. The beard was so white that it looked unreal in the middle of our filthy cell. But even more striking than his beard were the gentle old man’s eyes: they were dark and peaceful and literally radiated tenderness.” He goes on to describe Shelkov’s method of argument: quiet and tolerant, but knowledgeable and insisting on the final victory of good over evil.

Shelkov’s entire guilt lay in his rejection of war. Because of this the Soviet authorities feared his influence on young people: as he had deep faith and education he was able to persuade people he was right.¹⁴

Shelkov was elected leader (chairman) of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists in 1954. After his return from prison in 1967, he was instrumental in organizing the Adventist *samizdat* activities which have annoyed the Soviet authorities ever since. The success of the *True Witness* press and the photocopying and reproduction of Adventist works are tacitly

acknowledged in Soviet newspapers, which accuse the Adventists of “educating children and young people in an anti-Soviet spirit” by “producing and disseminating handwritten and typed pamphlets” and “spreading literature slandering our social system”.¹⁵ This last charge refers to the publicity given by Shelkov and the Adventist press to violations of citizens’ rights by the officials of *gosateizm*

Adventists and the Madrid Conference

Currently, in Madrid, Spain, 35 governments are participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, reviewing their compliance with the Final Act they signed in Helsinki in 1975. Section VII of that Helsinki agreement demands that each signatory nation, including the United States and the Soviet Union, manifest “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief.”

The Council of the All Union Church of the True and Free Seventh-day Adventists has smuggled out of the Soviet Union a 863-page report charging that the Soviet Union is systematically violating the human rights provision of the Helsinki Accords by persecuting Adventists. The report lists 55 True and Free Seventh-day Adventists who are currently prisoners of conscience in Soviet jails. The names are accompanied by biographical details, photographs, length of prison sentences and in most cases addresses of prisons. Sometimes it is clearly stated that the offense is conscientious objection to military service or the offense of producing, storing or distributing unofficially published literature. Other times, the document reports that prisoners have been arrested for “purely religious life and activity,” which probably refers to the holding of religious services in homes or the organization of religious teaching of children.

The report also lists 257 Adventists whose homes have been subjected to searches by the KGB for religious literature. Four hundred pages of the document are a transcript of the 1979 trial in Tashkent of five leading True and Free Seventh-day Adventists, including their charismatic leader, the 84-year-old Vladimir Shelkov.

A copy of the document has been translated by scholars at Keston College, not an undergraduate school, but a research institute in Britain devoted to analyzing the state of religious faith and practice in Marxist countries, particularly in Europe. Regarded by academic authorities as one of the most respected such centers, the institute’s patrons include the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is the head of the Anglican world community; the cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the senior bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain; the chief patriarch of the Orthodox Church in Britain and the Chief Rabbi of England. The director of the institute is a clergyman, Michael Bourdeaux, who also edits the institute’s journal, *Religion in Communist Lands*.

Keston College indicates that in addition to the massive new document submitted to the Madrid Conference, it has in its possession about 120 other documents that began to reach the West in the 1970s from the True and Free Seventh-day Adventists. The subject matter of this material is largely factual descriptions of government mistreatment of Adventists. Many of the

(state atheism): Adventist parents, such as Mariya Vlasyuk,¹⁶ deprived of parental rights; Adventist home-owners, such as N. Mikhel,¹⁷ fined for holding religious meetings or storing Adventist literature; and young men, such as Alexander Mikhel,¹⁸ imprisoned for refusing to join the army. Shelkov's vast output of articles and books (110 works were listed at his 1979 trial),

which made him a leading *samizdat* author, were largely produced while he was in hiding from the authorities (like other leading "unofficial" Adventists) between 1969 and 1978. If he had not evaded arrest in this way, he would certainly have been imprisoned earlier on the same charges as those he faced after his arrest at his daughter's flat on 14 March 1978. His works, although theological in content,

experiences parallel that of other religious groups unrecognized by the government. The most common specifically Adventist grievance is the government's refusal to allow True and Free Adventists exemption from work or school on Saturdays. The few theoretical articles by V. A. Shelkov among the papers are largely discussions of the relation between the state and religion.

Miss Marie Sapiets, a specialist at Keston College on religion in the Soviet Union, states that "this material is in Russian and at present we do not have the financial resources to translate it all into English. We are hoping to obtain financial backing for a book on Soviet Adventists, but this has not yet been forthcoming."

Researchers at Keston College recognize that differences of belief and practice exist among Seventh-day Adventists within the Soviet Union. However, the material they have from the True and Free Seventh-day Adventists persistently claims that their failure to obtain recognition from the government as a religious community stems from their consistent adherence to conscientious objection to military service and to such typically strict Seventh-day Adventist standards of Sabbath observance as refusal to send children to school for Saturday classes. The following passages in the recent "Appeal" from the Council of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-day Adventists to the Madrid Conference are typically uncompromising expressions of their views:

Adventists form a voluntary Christian organization based on the Ten Commandments and the Law of God, which for them is the source of all rights and

freedoms. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief are divine gifts to mankind. No one has the right to dictate to other people in this respect or to force others to conform with his own thoughts and beliefs. . . .

State atheism grants "freedom of conscience" on its own terms to believers who compromise their consciences by breaking the commandments "Do not kill" and "Keep holy the Sabbath Day." This the True and Free Seventh-day Adventists cannot do. They are for true freedom of conscience and are not willing to lie about state atheist persecution. Instead they publicize state atheist acts of violence and repression against believers and for this they are prosecuted as slanderers. Nevertheless, publicity in such cases is both right and useful in obtaining concessions from the authorities. Their open, peaceful struggle for human rights against state atheist repression may yet lead to true freedom of conscience in the USSR. To this end the Church of True and Free Seventh-day Adventists is presenting this collection of factual evidence to the delegates at Madrid, so that the Soviet Union may be called upon to fulfill its obligations according to the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference: observance of true freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief.

Further information concerning True and Free Seventh-day Adventist documents may be obtained by directly contacting Keston College, Heathfield Road, Keston, Kent BR2 6BA, England.

constantly reaffirm the True and Free Adventist commitment to pacifism, Saturday observance and evangelization of young people. In his analyses of Soviet legislation, he rejects all state interference in religious organizations and proclaims freedom of conscience as a divinely given right. On the basis of the Soviet Constitution and laws of 1918–24, he rejects later anti-religious legislation as unlawful and supports evasion of such legislation, even issuing instructions for those in danger of arrest under the title “How to Behave before Ill-intentioned Blasphemers who Unjustly Persecute Innocent Believers”. A “holy silence” is recommended in reply to threats and unlawful questions.

The 1978–79 KGB campaign against the True and Free Adventists involved searches and confiscation of religious literature, and arrests and trials of Adventists found transporting or storing such literature. It culminated in the trial in March 1979 of V. A. Shelkov, his son-in-law I. S. Lepshin, and his close associates A. A. Spalin, S. I. Maslov and S. P. Furlet. The abandonment of any pretence of legality or justice during the trial was excessive even for a Soviet court and seems to have shocked the officially-appointed defence counsel, G. Spodik, who defied Judge N. S. Artemov in insisting that the defendant’s words should be fully and correctly recorded instead of being deleted on the judge’s orders. Shelkov and the others were charged with “inciting citizens to refuse to participate in public life and fulfil their civil obligations”, running a “conspiratorial organization”, living on the means of believers and “disseminating knowingly false fabrications slandering the Soviet State.”¹⁹ No fewer than 155 Adventists had stated in writing that they were prepared to testify in court that Shelkov had given a true account of their persecution by the state organs for “purely religious convictions”, but they were wholly ignored by the judges and were physically prevented from travelling to Tashkent or entering the courtroom. Instead, the main prosecution witness was V. V. Illarionov, son of a well-known True and Free Adventist, and now an atheist. Before his appearance in court he had been serving an 11-year sentence (imposed in 1976) for theft, fraud and

forgery. Even he made no statement that constituted proof of the charges against the accused, merely agreeing with the court in describing Adventist *samizdat* literature as “libellous” and stating that other Adventists would condemn a sect member who joined the armed forces (although they would do him no physical injury).²⁰ No attempt was made in court to prove Shelkov’s works libellous — it was merely stated that they were reactionary and anti-Soviet and that they accused the authorities of being non-Leninist.

Perhaps the most revealing section of the indictment was that accusing Shelkov and the others of “joining with the illegal Baptist sect and the so-called ‘dissidents’ — such as Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, Orlov, Ginzburg, Khodorovich, Grigorenko and others . . .” Shelkov was accused of storing works by these persons for “slandering purposes”. Works by Solzhenitsyn, documents by Orlov and Ginzburg, copies of the *Chronicle of Current Events* and the *Bulletin of the Council of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Prisoners’ Relatives* were given as examples of slanders that Shelkov had distributed, sending them abroad to “mislead world public opinion”. It is indeed an interesting fact that the True and Free Adventists had established close links with the Soviet human rights movement as a whole, sending reports to the *Chronicle of Current Events* and making contact with secular “dissidents” such as Academician Sakharov. V. A. Shelkov himself had written to President Carter appealing for help in releasing Yuri Orlov and Alexander Ginzburg, who had defended “true justice and morality” as enshrined in the Ten Commandments. He described them as “self-sacrificing, selfless men, with no thought for their own profit”, who had fought for the suffering families of prisoners and had defended true spiritual values against the “cult of the God of Prisons”.²¹ Nevertheless, although he obviously respected such men as fellow-fighters for universal rights and freedoms, Shelkov had criticized the dissidents for having no “united ideal”: “they know what they don’t want, but not what they do want”.²² Some

were still attached to the idea of “impure government” by the imposition of some ideology, national or religious, by the State. Shelkov affirmed the True and Free Adventist position in proclaiming the necessity of the “pure” religion, unattached to nationality or State. His views were respected, as he was himself, by people as far removed from his position as Andrei Sakharov, who came to “attend” his trial from outside the closed courtroom. Sakharov’s appeal to the Pope, heads of States which were party to the Helsinki agreements and world public opinion on Shelkov’s behalf condemned the sentence eventually passed on 23 March (five years in a strict regime camp) as “cruelty surpassing all norms of decency”.²³ His intervention brought Shelkov’s plight to the eyes of the world, but too late to save the 84-year-old man’s life. Like his predecessors, Ostvald and Manzhura, V. A. Shelkov died “in chains” on 27 January 1980.

It is possible that the Soviet authorities had intended this: Shelkov had defied them too

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long and too successfully. The KGB officials who arrested him told the old man “Now you’re going to pay for everything, grandad”.²⁴ His daughter-in-law Dina described in a letter to Amnesty International how the prison authorities had refused to take warm clothing she had brought for Shelkov. The leader of the True and Free Adventists would not have found his end inappropriate, however. He himself had constantly emphasized the necessity of self-sacrifice in the “bloodless fight” against evil, in the name of divinely-given human rights.

It is impossible to predict who his successor might be. The True and Free Adventists

are continuing their activities, producing long accounts of the March trial and its after-effects. It was clear from the evidence presented at Shelkov’s trial that they are organized in three groups — Caucasian, Western (Baltic and Ukraine) and Central (Urals and Russia) — united by a central All-Union Council. The total number of True and Free Adventists is almost impossible to estimate: it may even surpass the “official” Adventist figure (21,500 in 1964). Their deputy chairman at the moment is Mikhail Ivanovich Illarionov from Tashkent, whose nephew gave evidence in court against Shelkov (see above). The new chairman may be his brother, another Illarionov, or one of those imprisoned with Shelkov, such as I. S. Lepshin or A. A. Spalin (both serving five-year sentences); or the choice may fall upon someone like Rostislav Galetsky, now living “in hiding” as Shelkov once did. Galetsky, now 32 years old, is the author of a number of *samizdat* documents on the situation of believers in the USSR. He has also publicly supported Yuri Orlov. In May 1978 he founded the Group for Legal Struggle and Investigation of Facts concerning the Persecution of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists in the USSR. This Group is similar in its aims to the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers’ Rights, although it concentrates on monitoring the persecution of fellow-Adventists. It has already published more than 50 documents about searches and bugging of Adventist homes and arrests of True and Free Adventists. At the age of 13, Galetsky was already an Adventist evangelist and was expelled from a corrective school for this reason. He now travels round Adventist communities in the USSR, distributing literature and collecting new complaints about religious persecution. Like other “unofficial” Adventist leaders living such a life, he does not see his family for months on end.²⁵

Western Adventist leaders have visited the Soviet Union, participating in “official” Adventist services in Odessa, Tallinn and other towns, but have not attempted to establish contacts with the True and Free Advent-

ists. They are largely of the opinion that the True and Free Adventists in the USSR are an offshoot of a German reformist group that split away from the central Adventist Church during the First World War, mainly over the issue of military service. Shelkov did indeed condemn military service with reference to the 1914-18 war (see above) but he also emphasized that his objection is to bearing arms, not to military service as such (which is the same as the normal Adventist position). It is difficult for western Adventists to form a clear view of the True and Free Remnant as they have not in general studied the documents by the latter which have reached the West, but have relied instead for their information on official Adventist spokesmen.

The recent decision by the Soviet government to allow two representatives of the officially recognized Adventist Church to attend a meeting of the International Council of the

Seventh-Day Adventist Executive Committee in the USA may be an attempt to counter the publicity achieved by the True and Free Adventists for their accounts of anti-religious repression in the USSR. M. P. Kulakov, one of the Soviet Adventist delegates, told American Adventists that V. A. Shelkov and the True and Free Remnant held unorthodox views and were not really Adventists, that Shelkov had represented himself as a new "prophet", and that he had rejected contact with the official Adventist body. Similar attempts were made in the 1960s to cast doubts on the credentials of "unofficial" Baptist spokesmen by means of "official" Baptist statements. It is to be hoped that international Adventist opinion will suspend judgement on the True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists of the USSR until more of the facts are known.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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5. A. Belov, *Adventizm*, pp. 54, 58.
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7. Lenin's phrase has recently been quoted in: A. Belov, "Adventisty i adventizm", *Nauka i religiya*, No. 3, 1978, p. 31.
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20. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.
21. V. A. Shelkov, *Prosha Prezidentu SShA Dzhimmi Karteru*, 23 February 1977, pp. 2-4. *Samizdat* available from Keston College.
22. V. A. Shelkov, *Ediny ideal*, October 1975, p. 6. *Samizdat* available from Keston College. Also in *Arkhiv Samizdata*, a collection of *samizdat* documents produced by Radio Liberty, AS 2349.
23. See: *Chronicle of Current Events* (Russian edition), No. 53, p. 25.
24. *Presledovaniya adventistov*, 10-16 April 1978, Helsinki Monitoring Group Document No. 45, p. 3. *Samizdat* available from Keston College. Also AS 3311.
25. *New York Times*, 16 October 1977.