



Two Years After the Revolution: Germany and Czechoslovakia

Spectrum's editor gets to meet some of the Adventists who helped bring down the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain.

by Roy Branson

THE 20-YEAR-OLD ADVENTIST WOMAN HAD TO walk past East German security police. She couldn't help but see that they were snapping pictures of everyone entering the Evangelische (Protestant) church in Karl Marx Stadt (near Chemnitz). Once inside, she became part of a prayer meeting for peace and justice that had been gathering every Sabbath afternoon for several weeks.

After the prayers, hymn singing, Scripture readings, and testimony, a discussion began. Should those inside the church bear witness to the community outside? Should a Christian commitment to peace and justice lead to public demonstrations? Should the church stay out of what might be interpreted as political protest against the regime, or should Christians actively invite all to join in the fight against injustice by marching in the streets?

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Finally, as the debate that particular Sabbath afternoon in September of 1989 droned on inconclusively, a 20-year-old woman, the daughter of an employee of the German Seventh-day Adventist Church, stood up and called out, "Follow me." She strode out of the church, through the security police, and on to the streets of Karl Marx Stadt. The marches didn't stop until the communist regime in East Germany had been toppled.

Two years later, in September of 1991, I visited the eastern part of Germany and Czechoslovakia. I learned that in 1989 Adventists in Germany, and also in Czechoslovakia, had risked their lives to protest injustice. They had joined in the largely peaceful revolution against what they considered to be tyranny. While the official position of the Adventist Church in East Germany was ambiguous, the Czechoslovakian Union adopted a statement in the midst of their "velvet" revolution identifying Seventh-day Adventists with the demands of the reformers in the streets.

Germany: Active Lay Persons, Cautious Leaders

Leipzig, the second largest city in what was East Germany, was the heart of resistance in 1989 to the Communist regime. One Sabbath in September I traveled to the edge of downtown Leipzig to visit Adventhaus, the largest Adventist congregation in the city. Upstairs, in a sunny sanctuary complete with a modern sculpture of the three angels of Revelation and a small pipe organ, some 200 members of all ages participated in a lively worship service.

After the worship service, member after member hustled up to a middle-aged gentlemen of medium height who greeted them in a warm, informal manner. He was Dr. Dietrich Wagler, one of the two local elders of Adventhaus. Dr. Wagler is a physical chemist who has worked for 20 years at the East German Academy of Science. That Sabbath, and in a later extended conversation, Dr. Wagler talked about 1989 with wonder, as though he can still hardly believe what was achieved. "I thought we might be able to get a better German Democratic Republic; to become unified with West Germany was only a dream."

Actually, it was Wagler's friend, Gerhard Ruehle, the other local elder of their congregation, who first got involved. Through the years, Ruehle had had the courage to send signed protests to the government. In the summer of

1989, the large Nicolai church, a congregation of the established Evangelische (Protestant) church located next to the university and the central Karl Marx square, began holding Monday evening prayer meetings for peace, justice, and freedom. At once, Ruehle began faithfully attending. A few other Adventists joined him.

By September, other Protestant congregations in Leipzig (and other parts of East Germany, like Karl Marx Stadt), began holding similar Monday evening prayer meetings. Wagler, his wife and daughter, and some other

Adventists, began attending the Reformation church. In the Sabbath morning worship services at Adventhaus, Ruehle and Wagler would ask the members to pray at home for freedom and peace.

The two elders wanted their downtown congregation to do more. They thought Adventhaus should also hold Monday evening prayers meetings for peace, justice, and freedom. Already Gunter Hampel,

then the choir director at Adventhaus (now an editor at the denominational publishing plant in Hamburg), had adjusted rehearsals so members could attend the Monday evening prayer meetings at the Nicolai church. The youth pastor for Leipzig, Hartmut Lipke, was one of those attending the prayer meetings. However, in vigorous discussions, other pastors and members successfully opposed Adventists holding their own Monday night prayer meetings in Leipzig. I didn't meet anyone who knew of an Adventist congregation in East Germany that held prayer meetings for peace and justice.



Later in September, the second stage of the peaceful revolution began. At the conclusion of prayer meetings, participants marched from the sanctuaries outside and quietly circled the churches. The marches rapidly grew in size, until the fateful third stage was reached: those attending the prayer meetings began marching in widening circles around downtown Leipzig. Wagler estimates that 30 or 40 Adventists from Leipzig congregations participated. He also remembers meeting 10 or 15 strangers at these demonstrations who turned out to be Adventists who had traveled from other parts of East Germany to participate. Some took part in more than one march.

Monday, October 9, 1989, was the climactic day for Leipzig, indeed for all East Germany. Wagler remembers that his friend Ruehle left work about 3 P.M. to go to the Nicolai church. About 5 P.M. Wagler and his family, along with three or four other Adventist families, went to the Reformation church. Around 6 P.M. worshipers from the churches set out on a march around the inner ring-road of downtown Leipzig. So many others joined that the march grew to more than 100,000 citizens. Wagler and his family could only move a few meters in a half hour. For them, "It was a special moment." I asked if he and his wife had discussed the danger of violence and the advisability of only one parent going on the march. He looked genuinely surprised. "Oh no. It was always clear our whole family would go together." Then he grinned, and said proudly, "In fact, a few weeks later, on my daughter's birthday, December 4, she was part of the crowd that broke into the Stasi [secret police] headquarters here in Leipzig, and seized their records."

Later, they heard that leaders of security forces had refused, on October 9, to carry out orders from Erich Honecker, the leader of East Germany, to disperse the marchers, even if it meant shooting some of them. Mass demonstrations spread to Berlin. Within a month, the Berlin Wall had begun to come down. Wagler, Ruehle and the other Adventists continued to

participate in the demonstrations in Leipzig until March of 1990, when the first free, multi-party elections were held in East Germany.

In the midst of these marches, Wagler was challenged one morning by his colleagues at the Academy of Science. Why did his Seventh-day Adventist church officially support the Honecker regime, when the Protestant church of East Germany was leading the opposition to it? Wagler looked at the headline and story printed in the Communist party newspaper, the largest in East Germany. He was dumbfounded to read about a letter from the East German Adventist Union congratulating the government for its 40 years of service to the people.

When Wagler came to the point of describing his reaction, and that of Ruehle and the other lay members, he leafed through my German-English dictionary until he found the precise word he was looking for: "indignant."

The laymen wrote to the union president, and in October he traveled down from Berlin for a stormy meeting. Wagler recalls the union president having a variety of reasons for sending the letter. He explained that all denominations routinely sent letters of congratulation to the government on the anniversary of the founding of the German Democratic Republic, and this was the 40th. And to be honest, increasingly the government had allowed Adventist children to miss school on Sabbath. The government had also permitted the union to print a 10-page, monthly news sheet for Adventist members in East Germany. And not to be forgotten was the government's tolerating the Adventists' operation of Friedensau Theological Seminary, with its large plant and extensive property.

The union president also pointed out that the Adventists were not in the same position as the large Evangelische, or Protestant church, which had a special, official status with the German Democratic Republic. Adventists, after all, were a small denomination, with only 19,000 East German members. The union

president also wanted members in Leipzig to know that the letter from the union had included some implied criticisms, which the report in the party newspaper had excised.

Nevertheless, before the two hours of discussion were over, the union president acknowledged that the situation was very unfortunate. It wasn't just Adventists in Leipzig who were upset. He had received complaints about the union's letter from Adventists throughout East Germany.

The lay leaders, in turn, recognized that some good points did appear in the letter, as originally written.

They still wanted the church to open its buildings to Monday evening critics of the government. They felt that at least denominational leaders should have found a way to avoid leaving the impression that Adventists supported the Communist regime.

One denominational worker I met elsewhere in Germany suggested that the union leadership, before sending off their letter, should have called one or two of the other small denominations, such as the Baptists or Methodists, and asked how they were going to handle the usual letter of congratulation to the German Democratic Republic. After all, whatever they had said or written in 1989 had not allowed the regime to give the impression it was receiving official Baptist or Methodist endorsement.

What has been the legacy of this recent past? Have the events of 1989 had any impact on the present Adventist church in Germany? What about its future? I pursued these questions in my conversations with a union denominational leader in Berlin and with the faculty at

the Adventist school at Friedensau.

Pastor Helmut Sass, director of church ministries for the East German Union, invited me to meet him at his home deep in what had been Communist East Berlin. ("When you get off the train, I will be the one carrying a copy of the *Adventist Review*.") He, his wife, and two teenage children live several blocks from the train in an upstairs apartment. Without prior warning that she would have a visitor, Mrs. Sass returned from work and graciously included me in supper. Afterwards, while his daughter practiced her music in the next room, Sass and

I settled down in their high-ceilinged living room with minimal lighting to get acquainted.

His mother had been an Adventist, his father, for 50 years, a communist party official. A vociferous anti-Nazi, Sass's father had become convinced that the party was the best vehicle for building a better society. In the first city

in Germany to become Communist, the father became the party secretary among the textile workers. His commitment to the party remained strong until he was told by party officials that his wife being a Christian was an embarrassment; he should either get rid of her Christianity or divorce her. He refused to give in to their pressure. Still, Sass's father was disappointed when his son chose the church instead of the party.

But the father did pass on to his son a thirst for social justice. Sass described preaching sermons calling for a frank acknowledgement by Germans of their responsibility for perpetrating two world wars and persecution of Jews and Slavs. Some of those who heard his ser-

A huge demonstration of 200,000 or more at Berlin's central Alexanderplatz went on through most of the day, Sabbath, November 4. Sass went to church in the morning and to the demonstration in the afternoon. He knows of other Adventists who did the same.

mons said Adventists should not worry about society. Others, particularly older members, told him to stop reminding them of these unpleasant actions in the past. And some of the younger Adventists said he was preaching about problems of the older generation, not theirs.

Sass knew all about the young Adventist woman leading the demonstrations in Karl Marx Stadt. Soon after she started the marches, he had been asked for his advice. As the growing demonstrations became a major development in East German public life, the police in Karl Marx Stadt grew increasingly nervous. They began pursuing specific demonstrators. One target, a young man, remembered the young Adventist woman who had led the first demonstration. In October he sought refuge from the police in her parent's home. The father, the denominational worker, asked Sass's advice and ended up giving the young demonstrator shelter for 10 days.

Sass recalled that in Berlin the pattern had been the same as elsewhere: first, prayer meetings during September in the Gethsemane congregation of the established Protestant

church, then marches in October around the church building, and finally a huge demonstration of 200,000 or more at the central Alexanderplatz. That event went on through most of the day, Sabbath, November 4. Sass went to church in the morning and to the demonstration in the afternoon. He knows other Adventists did the same.

Sass also remembers November 10. He was up early and heard the news on the radio. He hurried around waking up his three children. "Today we go to West Berlin." They thought he was crazy. But at the Friedrichstrasse elevated train station the family saw a line of people actually going into West Berlin. Then, when they crossed the wall, the Sassses, like everyone else, were cheered and hugged by West Berliners. The family spent the day just walking around, but they still talk about it as though it were a visit to a magical kingdom.

Sass remains convinced that a central reason the Berlin Wall came down in November of 1989 was because so many Christians had gathered in prayer meetings, confessing the guilt of Germans in unjustly treating other peoples through two world wars. In response

Letter From the Union Executive Committee to Erich Honecker

Reported
in East Germany's
Largest Newspaper

September 1989
To the President,
Council of State of the German
Democratic Republic
Mr. Erich Honecker
Marx-Engels-Platz
Berlin 1020

Very Honorable President of the
Council of State!

On October 7, 1989, the German Democratic Republic will be 40 years old. For those of us who lived through and experienced the last four decades as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this occasions a look back on the path that now lies behind us. We have much to be thankful for.

We were able to build and dedicate new houses of worship. Our

theological seminary regained international recognition. Young people from churches in the GDR as well as students from Angola, Mozambique, the USSR and other countries were able to receive their education at Friedensau. Donations from our church members made possible a variety of aid that we were able to send via the Committee on Solidarity of the GDR to our African congregations.

The establishment, on September 7, 1964, of a non-combatant alternative service in the People's Army lifted a burden of conscience from many men whose religious convictions prevented them from bearing arms. We became gratefully aware that the state showed a growing recognition of our right to "an

to these confessions, God could act to bring down the Wall.

Sass is surprised and disappointed that since the 1989 revolution young people, in and out of the Adventist Church, have failed to sustain a concern for society. Everyone, he said sadly, has become preoccupied with his own narrower, personal problems.

The same assessment is made by Dieter Leutert, professor of church history at Friedensau Theological Seminary. He said that apart from a few intellectuals, most Germans, including Adventists, are now expending all their energy coping with personal crises. Furthermore, Adventists had not traditionally been concerned with social issues. Adventists, unlike Catholics and other Protestants, have not honored those members who sacrificed for moral principles. But such members existed.

One warm afternoon in early September, Leutert and I walked to Friedensau's cemetery. He recounted the experiences of many buried there, pausing to point out the headstone of Hermann Kobs, 1890-1972. He had been the dominant theological influence on generations of East German pastors trained at

Friedensau. But Kobs had been condemned by the Gestapo to a concentration camp, where he remained throughout World War II. What was his crime? Baptizing a Jew. Leutert pointed to other Adventist pastors who had not survived those years because of punishments for opposing the Nazis. But, Leutert said, Adventists don't remember their martyrs for social justice; we have not developed a theological rationale for social concern. Consequently, while some members had become caught up in the revolution of 1989, Adventists had no basis for sustained involvement.

That may change if plans being laid for Friedensau are fulfilled. Between the fall of the Honecker regime and the integration of East Germany into the Federal Republic of Germany, Friedensau, for the first time, was officially authorized to grant university level degrees—and not only in theology. Dr. Baldur Pfeiffer, like other West Germans who now are mayors or governors in East Germany, has recently come from West Germany to be the president of Friedensau. For several years he had been in charge of religious liberty for the Adventist churches in West Germany, and in-

undisturbed and unencumbered Sabbath observance" (*Law Encyclopedia*, State Publishing House, GDR, 1988). Difficulties that nonetheless arose we were able to resolve through open and objective talks with various government offices. We would like hereby to make special mention of the office of State Secretary for Church Affairs which continues to be motivated to find appropriate solutions to church-state conflicts.

Currently we feel a burden over the defection of many of our citizens, including some of our church members. The question that troubles us: Why are they leaving us? What causes lie behind the fact that particularly many of our young people, who were schooled and trained here, lived and

worked among us, have left, or still want to leave, the GDR? We entreat you to contemplate these questions on a higher plane of seriousness and to find helpful answers.

We are grateful for statements such as the following: "Our socialist society offers every citizen, irrespective of age and gender, ideology and religious confession, the right to safety and security, clear prospects for the future, and the opportunity to develop fully his talents, competencies, and individuality" (Erich Honecker, October 1976). We would wish, however, that such positive declarations be put into practice at all times and in all places so that the GDR might, indeed, become a happy and secure home to "every citizen."

The personal needs of the ill, elderly, and handicapped in many parochial and state institutions are enormous. We bid you to consider whether a federal initiative using military construction personnel might not provide needed relief and a solution satisfactory to both sides.

We ask you to accept the above reflections as an expression of our continued participation in the shaping of the GDR.

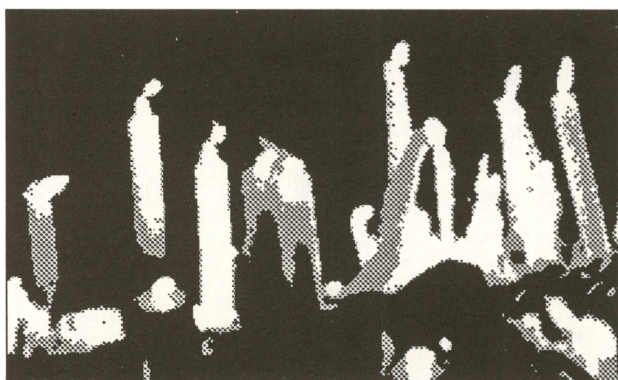
With prayerful consideration and mindful of your considerable responsibilities, I greet you in the name of the denominational leadership.

L. Reiche
President, Denomination
of Seventh-day Adventists

involved in discussions of human rights at the relevant organizations of the European Community. At Friedensau, Pfeiffer has already started teaching a course in human rights.

The school now has less than 40 seminary students, but Pfeiffer and the Adventist Church in Germany have great plans for Friedensau. Darmstadt, where West German Adventists, since World War II, have received their theological training, has become strictly a gymnasium (pre-university education, roughly equivalent to an American junior college). Friedensau will offer only university degrees, initially in three areas—theology, social sciences, and health policy. Dr. Pfeiffer plans to offer courses in several languages and draw students from everywhere, particularly Eastern Europe. Although at its height, between the wars, Friedensau had about 300 students, Pfeiffer doesn't see why Friedensau can't eventually grow to 500 or maybe even 1,000 students.

A large men's dormitory is already under construction, with more buildings planned. They will expand a campus that already includes many other single-story buildings, faculty homes, and four massive, multistory brick edifices constructed between 1899 and 1910, when Friedensau was established as the first Adventist seminary in Europe. Friedensau has room to expand. About two hours away from Berlin, the school is situated on 153 hectares (or 378 acres) of contiguous property. "Do either Andrews or Loma Linda sit on that much land?" wondered Dr. Pfeiffer.



Czechoslovakia: Official Support for the Revolution

Friday evening, November 17, 1989, security forces of the Communist government of Czechoslovakia beat up unarmed civilians peacefully demonstrating in downtown Prague. Two hundred and fifty people were injured, and 40 were hospitalized. Within hours, photographs of a badly beaten, disfigured face, along with a copy of the young man's hospital report, were plastered on walls all over Prague. The people of the capital city had proof that their government had violently turned on them. As the entire world knows, demonstrations resumed that toppled the Communist government within days. Very few know that the badly beaten face in the photograph was that of a young Seventh-day Adventist, and that the person who took his picture was an Adventist photojournalist. I was privileged to visit for several hours with both of them.

Jan Pospisil, the man in the accompanying picture, may be the softest-spoken revolutionary in Christendom. Dark, slightly built, and given to long pauses before answering questions, Jan seems much more typical of the conscientious objector to military service that he now is, than a determined rebel against totalitarianism. One evening, in a bustling Prague restaurant, Jan and his girlfriend, Karin, told me that while Jan's defiance of the repressive Communist regime went back earlier, it was January 15, 1989, when Jan and the regime clashed openly.

Around 2 P.M. that day, a group of only 10 or 15 people brought flowers to the center of Prague—to the spot in Wenceslas Square where Jan Palach, a university student, had several years before immolated himself. Some Czechs were determined not to forget his sacrificial protest against tyranny. As the number of observers began to grow, police with unmuzzled dogs pushed some back and beat

others. When the police allowed one of the dogs to knock down an elderly man, Jan protested—loudly. He was arrested, interrogated, and held in custody. He wasn't released until 9 P.M.

The next day Vaclav Havel, a playwright already known for his championing of human rights, was also arrested and sentenced to an eight-month prison term. The day after that—Tuesday, January 17—25,000 people protested his arrest. Wednesday and Thursday twice that number gathered in Wenceslas square, including Jan Pospisil (out of jail two days), and three or four other Adventists.

In June, Jan accepted another challenge. A petition began circulating around Prague. Much later it was learned that Havel had been the author. The petition called on the government to meet several demands, including freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom from the designation of the Communists as the "leading party." Every night from Munich, Radio Free Europe broadcast the names of the latest signatories. An astounding 80,000 people put their names on the petition, risking their careers, even their safety, to register a lawful, nonviolent, and very public commitment to basic human rights. Jan was convinced that the petition was a turning point for Czechoslovakia. "It was important for the government and the people to realize that if citizens spoke out in great numbers they might not automatically suffer reprisals." Only two or three of the signatories, including Jan Pospisil, were Adventists. (Jan's girlfriend, Karin, admitted, a little sheepishly, "No, I didn't sign it.")

Adventists in Prague continued to have opportunities to join those openly seeking changes in the government. Non-violent demonstrations took place on August 21, October 28, November 1, and November 15. Jan continued to attend church faithfully. In fact, he and Karin did not attend the October 28 demonstration because it fell on Sabbath.

As a matter of course, he talked with his

Adventist friends about the demonstrations and why he was taking part, but the discussions never took place in the church sanctuary. Early on, he had been warned that he must be wary that some church members might be government informers. Gradually, more Adventists participated in public demonstrations. Jan estimates that about 35 were involved. Most of Prague's Adventists were passively pleased that other members were trying to change the government. Only 10 to 15 percent, Jan estimates, opposed any involvement by Adventists.

Given the pace of protests, Jan knew that the officially sanctioned commemoration on Friday, November 17, of a student who died fighting for Czechoslovakia in World War II might well develop into a major demonstration. Although it would probably persist from its scheduled 4 P.M. start past sundown, into the beginning of the Sabbath, Jan decided to join.

Just south of the heart of Prague, in a section occupied by several universities and professional schools, including his own, Jan found 30,000 to 40,000 people, primarily students. Jan recalls the electric atmosphere. Many in the crowd held up posters denouncing the Communist Party. At the end of the commemorative proceedings no one left. Everyone expected more.

Rather than dispersing, the crowd walked over to a historic church in the Vysehrad section, closer to downtown Prague. The crowd lighted candles. Speakers began taking enormous risks. Older, former students denounced the incumbent head of the Communist Party by name. Younger speakers attacked the hardline communist mayor of Prague. By now, thousands of others had streamed in from all over the city, almost doubling the crowd to 70,000. Some set out on the most direct route north to Wenceslas Square. They ran into police. The crowd waited for 15 minutes, not sure what route to take, but determined to reach the symbolic

center of the city.

Finally, the leaders started the huge mass along the avenue running north beside the Vltava (or Moldau) River. Along the way, demonstrators called out to people on side streets, "Come with us." The crowd grew. It passed the corner apartment, facing the river, where Havel still lives. At the corner where the crowd turned east, away from the river on to National Street, which leads to Wenceslas Square, is the national theater. The actors—the most prominent and privileged in Czechoslovakia—interrupted their performances to come outside and cheer on the demonstrators.

Jan was at the end of the crowd. After the last of the more than 70,000 people had made the turn from the river avenue on to National Street, police moved quickly to block both the front and rear of the column. Jan and the other demonstrators stood, trapped, for an hour and a half. White-helmeted regular police, now joined by red berets, tough security forces from the ministry of interior, started sealing off side

streets. When armored vehicles, with metal shields mounted on their grilles, began pressing the back of the column into the people ahead, Jan decided to act. He somehow slipped out of the main column, into a side street, then turned and walked on a street parallel to the trapped demonstrators. He wanted to pass the head of the column, cross back across National Street, and head home.

He didn't walk far enough. As he turned to cross National Street, he discovered that he had come up behind the police blocking the front of the column of demonstrators. For a few minutes, Jan stood with a few others, silently watching the standoff. But the police and security forces were nervous facing demonstrators with onlookers at their backs. All of a sudden, without warning, some police turned and attacked the onlookers.

Jan remembers old people and children being beaten. Then he was hit. The police used a weapon with the wallop of an American baseball bat to batter Jan, including six or



Medical Report

Name: Ing. Pospisil Jan

Born: 1964

17th November 1989

He has been injured tonight during intervention by the police on Narodni trida. He was hit on his head by a truncheon, after he fell down he was further beaten and kicked. He protected his face, injury of the right upper extremity.

Objective finding: Lacerated wound 6 cm in length, swelling of the 3rd finger of the left upper extremity, motility limited, tenderness of the right forearm, tenderness of the right costovertebral angle. Neurological scan without pathological finding, state after epistaxis. He was non unconscious, neurological scan without pathological finding.

X-ray of the cranium, nasal ossicles, right forearm, 3rd finger of the left upper extremity without traumatic signs.

Conclusion: V. lacerum frontis l.sin.

Contusio capitis, haematoma periorbit l.dx. incip.

Status after fracture of nasal ossicles (nose without tenderness)

Contusio dig.III. man. sin., antebrachii l.dx.

Recommendation: resting regimen, analgetic and symptomatic therapy, suture removal in health center next week. TAT 1986

Urine: Sediment - ery 1-2, WBC 8-10, other - without pathological findings.

Dr. Valdman

seven blows to the head. Even when he was on the ground, the police kicked and beat him. He remembers that one of the others injured was a female American journalist.

Jan was taken by ambulance to the hospital. Physicians told him that he had a broken finger, and took six stitches to sew up his head. He was finally released that night, and walked home. The next morning Karin didn't see him in church. She was told that Jan was sick. "I know what's happened," she said, and went across Prague to see him at his home. She found him with a torn lip, an injured mouth, and a face swollen out of recognition. To this day his scalp still has a six-inch scar. Three days later Jan was out demonstrating again.

I asked him what he said to Adventists who argued on the basis of Romans 13 that church members should not participate in movements to change even totalitarian governments. He said that he took the whole Bible seriously. Sometimes people looked at only parts of Scripture because they didn't have the courage to live lives of truth. He felt that the church needs to help others in society, not just itself.

When I leaned across the restaurant table and pressed him more personally, why—why did he get involved—he looked down, didn't say anything for a long time, and then only that it was difficult to talk about. Finally, he looked up. Because of "several experiences in my life," he had gone back to examine his "foundations." He decided he "wanted to live a life in freedom and in truth."

Jan and Karin walked with me the few blocks back to my hotel. They told me that, unfortunately, with times economically harder than before, people—especially foreigners—sometimes got robbed at night. "Before," Karin said, "the people were afraid of the police. Now the police are afraid of us."

On our walk I asked where they were putting their moral energy now. Jan referred to the problem of ecology, but then grinned. "We're very serious about travel." After not being able to go anywhere, they had been to Sweden,

Norway, and Finland. When they said they would very much like to go to Australia, my eyes must have widened. Karin assured me, "Monday it's Australia, Tuesday it's the United States."

"And Wednesday it's Africa," Jan chimed in.

Later in the week, on Sabbath, I learned from Dr. Jiri Moskala, the young dean of the Adventist seminary in Prague, about the official reaction of the Czechoslovakian Union to the revolution of 1989. I met Moskala after a service conducted in the building that houses one of Prague's Adventist congregations as well as the small Adventist seminary—one classroom and dormitory space for 15 students. When Moskala graciously invited me to lunch I discovered that the dean's apartment is also located in the same building.

Over soup, I learned that Moskala had studied for a year at Andrews University before the old Communist government forced him to return home. Undaunted, while still active as a local pastor, he enrolled in the Protestant faculty of theology at Charles University. Recently, Moskala became the first Seventh-day Adventist to receive a doctorate in theology from Czechoslovakia's oldest and most famous university. Moskala has invited his professors to speak on special occasions at the Adventist seminary. Although the seminary is very small, the professors have talked with admiration of the efforts of the Adventists to establish theological training in Prague.

The fact that the Protestant faculty Moskala attended is housed in a building near Wenceslas Square speeded up his awareness and involvement in the efforts to change the government. Early in 1989, after a day of studying, Moskala came out of the Protestant faculty building to discover that the police were chasing demonstrators in his direction from Wenceslas Square. In fact, Moskala had to run to avoid being rounded up in a police dragnet. In succeeding days, demonstrations continued, and Moskala decided to attend.

By the time the large demonstrations took place in mid-November, Moskala said other Adventist pastors showed up. The number grew when pastors from outside Prague came to the city to attend constituency meetings of the Czechoslovakian Union. Delegates would attend constituency meetings during the day. In the late afternoon and evening, some would observe and even join the demonstrations.

In the midst of this historic turning point in Czechoslovakian history, the union constituency meeting took two unusual actions. First, it swept in a generation of new, young leaders, most still in their thirties. The most obvious example was the election of an editor and the head of the publishing work, Karel Nowak, to become president of the union. The second

unprecedented action of the constituency was the adoption of an official statement of concern, protesting policies of the incumbent Communist regime.

Moskala could not help remembering with shame that in the 1970s the Seventh-day Adventist Czechoslovakian union committee, at the request of the government, had officially and publicly condemned Charter 77, the human-rights group led by Vaclav Havel. Its members provided the nucleus for the later nonviolent revolution of 1989.

The 1989 union constituency debated the propriety of Adventists making a statement protesting government action. In the end it was adopted by a substantial majority of the delegates. [See below.] The statement was sent

Protest Letter From the Czech Union Constituency

An open letter of the Czechoslovakian Seventh-day Adventist
Union Conference's delegates to Prime Minister L. Adamec

Prague, November 23, 1989

Dear Prime Minister:

In these days the Seventh-day Adventist Church is holding a Union Conference of about 300 delegates from the whole of Czechoslovakia. This highest institution of our church evaluated five years of the church's life, elected a new Executive Committee and made a program for the next years. The stormy events which have been experienced these days in our country are also affecting us.

We cannot agree with the brutality and violence of the emergency patrols of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs against a peaceful demonstration on November 17, 1989. This attitude is not leading to

the constructive dialogue needed for the regeneration of our society.

We are sure that one reason for the critical situation of our society in political, economical and ecological areas is moral failure, based on past deviation from biblical principles. The loss of the reverence for God the Creator corrupted human relationships, destroyed respect for life, and for all creation.

We fully support the open dialogue of all strata of society, including believers. We are for distribution of objective information, for civil freedom and for true evaluation of the past. Because we follow Christ's teaching and because we advocate the Christian and democratic traditions of the Huss and Comenius heritage, we wish further developments will lead to

close, reciprocal contact, greater confidence, and reconciliation.

We understand that our mission consists of efforts to remedy corrupted human relationships among families and youth, improve ways of living, and perform social activities.

This open letter, accepted by all delegates, we send as an expression of our sincere effort to help in the complicated situation in which our nations find themselves. We hope that it will be accepted with understanding.

Karel Nowak
Union President

ThDr. Oldrich Sládek
Director for Public Relations

formally to the president of the Republic and released directly to the press. The contrast with the action of the executive committee of the union in East Germany could not be more striking.

Otakar Jiranek was one of the delegates at the union constituency meeting who argued strongly in favor of the statement of protest. In fact, he was given the task of releasing the statement to his colleagues in the press. At that time, and for the prior decade, he was a professional photographer and photo-journalist. He is now the manager of the Country Life vegetarian restaurant in downtown Prague. We talked more than once, the last time for several hours in the Mediterranean-style apartment he had expanded and remodeled for his wife and three children. He not only threw light on what Adventists did during the time of the 1989 revolution, but also on what direction Czech Adventism might take in the future.

Jiranek is a convert to Adventism. Since his father, an agronomist, was sent by the Czechoslovakian government to consult with overseas agricultural experts, Jiranek grew up in a variety of countries. In Switzerland his sister encountered Adventists and joined the church. At her suggestion, Jiranek visited Adventist congregations in Prague, began attending regularly, but never joined. When he fell in love with his present wife she was an atheist. She was astonished to learn he was a believer, enjoying the fellowship of some community called the Seventh-day Adventists. They decided to become married when neither were yet members. Nevertheless, Jiranek requested an Adventist pastor to conduct their marriage ceremony in an Adventist church. He is still amazed that for the first time ever, their request was officially approved. Jiranek says that that response was a "binding experience." Subsequently both Jiranek and his girl friend were baptized and became active church members.

Jiranek did not participate in as many 1989 demonstrations as did Jan Pospisil. But he was

anything but passive. Immediately after the beatings of demonstrators on National Street, November 17, he took the photograph of his friend, Jan Pospisil, that shocked the citizens of Prague. Jiranek's pictures also stirred the delegates gathered from all over Czechoslovakia attending the union constituency meetings. Jiranek found himself informing fellow-delegates in morning sessions about demonstrations he had photographed the previous afternoon and evening.

Jiranek covered all the major events of November 1989. The evening Alexander Dubcek and Vaclav Havel both addressed the cheering thousands in Wenceslas Square, Jiranek was one of those who had to be shooed off the balcony from which they were speaking, for fear that it would be overloaded. As he recalled this and the other major demonstrations, Jiranek would repeat softly, "It was a special moment." (See accompanying photo essay.)

The moral passion of the 1989 revolution has continued to drive Jiranek. Three weeks after the mid-November demonstrations in Prague, Romania erupted. Jiranek immedi-



ately urged the Adventists to help. Although the union would not agree to get officially involved, an officer in the local Bohemian conference cooperated with Jiranek in offering to the Czechoslovakian Red Cross the services of two trucks owned by Adventists. Within hours, four Adventist drivers, including Jiranek and the local conference officer, were driving the two trucks loaded with eight tons of Red Cross supplies over winter roads, south through Hungary to the middle of Romania. The Czech Red Cross has continued to be grateful, saying the Adventists were the quickest to help.

Some months after the revolution in Prague, Jiranek suffered a bad fall. During an enforced convalescence and period of reflection, he decided to leave photo-journalism and dedicate his life more directly to service. He discovered *Country Life*, a name used by self-supporting Adventist restaurants, health-food stores, and country retreats in different parts of the United States and Europe. After being trained in France, Jiranek agreed to found *Country Life* in Prague. Visitors to Prague will inevitably pass it as they walk between the two centers of the city: Wenceslas Square and City Square. At mealtimes they will discover that they have to wait in line.

Through his family, a decade of journalistic contacts, and the introduction to Czechoslovakia of *Country Life*, Jiranek has become a part of the network of leaders building the new Czechoslovakia. While consulting with the head of the organic food section of the agricultural ministry, his father's old stomping ground, Jiranek was told that during his training period

in France he should look up the Czech ambassador. He did. The ambassador and his wife ended up spending a weekend on a *Country Life* retreat.

After an exploration of Adventist health principles, the prime minister of the Czech republic, one of two republics within Czechoslovakia, offered his assistance at any time. Jiranek took him up on his offer. With the prime minister's help Jiranek obtained *Country Life's* prime location. Jiranek negotiated permission to occupy two-thirds of a building shared with the editorial staff of the newspaper established by Civic Forum. At one time an underground publication, its editor was imprisoned by the Communist government. It now is one of the major newspapers in the country. Recently, Jiranek has agreed to help a group providing food to disabled mothers. He has met and talked with the chairperson of this association's governing committee, Olga Havel, wife of President Vaclav Havel.

The Adventist Church in Eastern Europe is defining its mission in the midst of a political and social environment that has been radically changed by the events of 1989. Society is more open than before to even small communities of concern; open to proposals for healthful living, education, the environment. Hopefully, as the church shapes its ministry in the new context, it will remember those members who cared enough to march boldly for freedom and justice. Hopefully, the Adventist church will remember those members who, because they know they risked everything, even their lives, for their neighbors, remember the nonviolent revolution of 1989 as a "special moment."