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September 23, 1993

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Religious liberty limits
die with Russian Parliament

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
9/23/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--One Russian Orthodox scheme to shut evangelicals out of the future of Russia was buried this week with corpse of the Russian Parliament, but other proposals are sure to follow.

That's the word from Gleb Yakunin on the fate of Parliament and its effect on the proposed legislation to limit religious liberty in Russia.

Yakunin, an Orthodox priest and Parliament member, is in Washington with another reformist lawmaker, Lev Ponomarev, searching for deep pockets and activists to back the nation's move toward democracy.

The reformers arrived in the United States just days before Russian President Boris Yeltsin disbanded Parliament Sept. 21 in a move he said would sustain the course of democracy. He called for new Parliamentary elections Dec. 11-12.

But 136 of 250 Parliament members met and declared Vice President Alexander Rutskoi as the nation's acting president in what Yakunin and others call a suspicious and invalid election.

Yakunin and Ponomarev seemed pleased they could no longer call themselves legislators, adding they had been demanding for some time that Yeltsin call new Parliamentary elections.

In a private meeting in Washington Sept. 23 with Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., Yakunin warned: "We must stay on guard even after the election. This legislation limiting religious freedom in Russia has been tabled for now, but the opposition will attempt to get it through the new Parliament."

Yakunin thanked Lugar for spearheading a drive on Capitol Hill to urge Yeltsin's rejection of limits to religious freedom in Russia. Lugar also had long been active in efforts to free Soviet prisoners of conscience.

Since last spring, the dissident Yakunin worked through human rights groups in the West to overcome a propaganda machine and defeat efforts by his leader, Patriarch Alexei, to win favored status for his Orthodox flock.

Yakunin called a decision by the New York-based Freedom of Conscience Foundation to honor Alexei "a mockery. ... I am appalled that next Tuesday (Sept. 28) the Patriarch will get that award," he said. Alexei stripped Yakunin of his parish during the communist era.

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Ponomarev told Baptist Press he believes the Parliament to be elected in December will abolish strict proposals against religious freedom, which were passed twice by lawmakers but never signed into law by Yeltsin. The limits would have given police and others power to regulate non-Orthodox Russians and ban foreign missionaries from spreading the gospel.

A deluge of response from the United States -- including an objection lodged by President Clinton -- took many Yeltsin advisers by surprise. But it helped offer Yeltsin needed support to stall the legislation. Yeltsin delayed the law twice by waiting out the full two weeks given to him before refusing to sign it. The delays kept it off the books.

For months, Yeltsin has worked to establish a new constitution guaranteeing religious freedom and other free market and democratic reforms. But Parliament's communist majority of 87 to 88 percent has blocked his efforts, Yakunin said.

In meetings with Washington policymakers, the Russian reformers said the Russian democracy movement needs money to buy media time -- and manpower to help them monitor free elections. Their visit coincided with a Senate vote Sept. 23 on whether to funnel \$2.5 billion of U.S. aid to Russia.

In a nationwide referendum April 25, voters asked for early elections to replace lawmakers two years before their terms were up. They also voted for lawmakers to draft a new constitution. But Russia's constitutional court -- controlled by Parliament -- ruled the vote invalid in its customary 8-4 split between pro- and anti-Yeltsin forces.

Yakunin, who started campaigning 28 years ago for religious freedom in Russia, seems confident any attempts at restoring the Parliament Yeltsin dismissed will prove futile.

Yakunin and Ponomarev said Yeltsin's suspension of the constitution was a move toward democracy -- not away from it. He either had to abolish Parliament or fight a civil war, they said. Flying to the United States, the two had discussed the fact that they might return home to a different country.

Ponomarev is one of several co-chairmen of the Democratic Russia movement, along with Yakunin, and helped organize the historic 1991 pro-democracy demonstrations in Moscow. Yakunin, an outspoken proponent of democracy, spent five years in prison and then two more in exile after founding a committee in 1976 to protect religious rights in the Soviet Union.

Yeltsin chose proactive measures to keep the country stable, first securing the solidarity of police and the army with his administration before abolishing Parliament, Yakunin said. Through a leak, Yakunin and others knew Yeltsin had spoken with the government leaders about a drastic action, but were expecting it several days earlier, he added.

Yakunin sought to assure U.S. policymakers that Yeltsin would encourage freedom throughout the process of electing new Russian lawmakers. He stressed Yeltsin used no force in closing Parliament. Expecting Yeltsin's action, communists had lowered the quorum needed for legislative action from two-thirds to one-half, Yakunin said, "but I am confident even 50 percent won't be able to unite to get it together."

The two Russian reformers told of their efforts to fight the communist status quo and pled for help at forums sponsored by such organizations as the National Endowment for Democracy and the International Republican Institute. They also met with congressmen and officials from the National Security Council, the Pentagon and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"Very dangerous legislation was being passed lately" in Russia, Yakunin said. As examples, he listed the limits on religious freedom, censorship of the media and a budget package with a \$20 billion-plus deficit -- amid inflation approaching 30 percent. "Still, the major fault of this Parliament was that it refused to develop a new constitution, without which any movement toward democracy is impossible."

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Parliament's religious liberty restrictions would have repealed the bold leap Russians took toward religious freedom in 1990. Lawmakers passed a law then forbidding state interference in religion. It marked the end of seven decades of religious repression under communism.

Still, evangelicals have feared the return of Orthodox domination in politics. Some Baptists in Russia say the Orthodox Church before the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 restricted religious freedom even more oppressively than the communist regime that succeeded it.

In a lecture at Catholic-founded Georgetown University in Washington, Yakunin criticized the Russian Orthodox patriarch for resorting to state controls on religion to compete with growing evangelical groups. "Russian Orthodoxy chose the easiest way, instead of going to the people," he said.

When Orthodox leaders complained about American evangelist Billy Graham's success in Russian crusades, Yakunin said he told them:

"I don't remember him telling anyone to switch denominations; I remember him just trying to preach the word of Christ."

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Clinton introduces proposal
on health care; concerns raised

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
9/23/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--Calling on Congress to "make this our most urgent priority," President Bill Clinton implored members of both houses Sept. 22 to join him in an effort to "guarantee every American comprehensive health benefits that can never be taken away."

In his long-awaited address, the president asked for a reformation of the country's health care system based on six principles: security, simplicity, savings, choice, quality, and responsibility. His proposal would provide every American with a health care security card assuring lifetime health care benefits.

"This health care system of ours is badly broken, and it is time to fix it," Clinton said. "Despite the dedication of literally millions of talented health care professionals, our health care is too uncertain and too expensive, too bureaucratic and too wasteful.

"We have to preserve and strengthen what is right with the health care system, but we have got to fix what is wrong with it," he said.

Clinton's 52-minute speech came before a joint session of Congress and a national television audience. It followed eight months of work by a health care task force headed by his wife, Hillary.

The proposal has raised ethical and religious concerns, however. Among these are:

- Abortion, which is included in the basic benefits package;
- Rationing of health care, which may be based on criteria other than medical need;
- Living wills, which will guide physicians in determining when to withhold treatment aimed at delaying death. According to The Washington Post, Hillary Clinton said on the eve of the president's speech, "We'll try to reduce the level of defensive medicine in the last six months of life."
- The status of hospital chaplains, who, according to an early analysis of the plan, may have to compete with other health care professionals for positions and salaries.

Pro-life members of Congress and pro-life organizations, including the CLC, have said they will oppose the plan unless abortion is removed from the basic package.

"It is abundantly evident that most Americans feel that our health care system needs major revision," said Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "President Clinton has done a good job of articulating many of the problems with the present system. I must confess, however, that I am more pleased with his diagnosis than I am with his prescription for treatment.

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"The CLC's major focus will be on how the president's proposed health care reforms impact sanctity of human life issues. Funding for abortion, the prospect of living wills and the attempts to ration health care in the last stages of life will be of paramount concern to us as we seek to inform Southern Baptists about the moral and ethical issues raised in the president's proposals," Land said.

Clinton asked Congress to pass health care legislation by the end of 1994.

The proposal primarily will be funded by premiums paid by employers and individuals, the president said. New taxes also will be levied on tobacco to pay for it, he said. In addition, large employers who opt out of the system will be expected to help underwrite it, he said.

"I believe as strongly as I can say that we can reform the costliest and most wasteful system on the face of the earth without enacting new, broad-based taxes," Clinton said.

The plan enables Americans to choose the kind of health care they desire, he said.

They can remain with their "current doctor, join a network of doctors and hospitals, or join a health maintenance organization," he said. "We also believe that doctors should have a choice as to what plans they practice in."

The vast majority of Americans "will pay the same or less for health care coverage that will be the same or better than the coverage they have tonight," he said.

Savings would be achieved not through price controls but by supporting competition, limiting the "rate at which prices can exceed the rate of inflation and population growth" and cracking down on fraud, the president said.

Quality will be assured, he said, by establishing "report cards on health plans."

To achieve simplicity, his proposal recommends a standard insurance form instead of hundreds, Clinton said. "A hospital ought to be a house of healing, not a monument to paperwork and bureaucracy," he said.

The federal government will establish a national health board to oversee the system, and states will set up health alliances, the president said.

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Abortion advocates, foes
square off on health care

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
9/23/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--A day before President Bill Clinton unveiled his health care reform plan to the American public, advocates and opponents of abortion asserted the controversial social issue will make or break their support for the long-awaited White House proposal.

Abortion will be covered in the basic benefits package for health insurance under the plan, the Clinton administration has revealed.

Pro-choice organizations and members of Congress said Sept. 21 inclusion of abortion is essential to their support of the health care proposal. On the same day, pro-life congressmen said they will oppose the plan unless it excludes abortion.

"As we enter one of the most decisive debates of the decade, it is essential to the public health and to the liberty of women in America that the role of abortion and all reproductive health services be an integral aspect of health reform and included in the plan," said Pamela Maraldo, president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, in a prepared statement. "Planned Parenthood cannot and will not support a plan that falls short of this goal."

Rep. Tim Hutchinson, R.-Ark., a Southern Baptist, said, "I want to support health care reform, but abortion service poisons the well of health care reform, and this is an issue on which we who believe in the sanctity of human life cannot bend, buckle or bow."

The Southern Baptist Convention's public policy agency also expressed its opposition to inclusion of abortion.

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"It is troubling that a president who is a Baptist would so clearly violate the consciences of millions of pro-life Americans by forcing them to pay for this reprehensible practice," said James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Christian Life Commission. "To the extent that abortion continues to be a part of this health care reform plan, the Christian Life Commission will oppose that plan.

"As details of the plan become known, we will be very careful to analyze its impact on other sanctity of human life issues. At this point we do not feel that Southern Baptists have given us direction on how to approach health care reform except to the extent it may impact sanctity of human life issues," Smith said.

"We urge all Southern Baptists to contact their representatives in Congress and request them to oppose taxpayer-funded abortion."

Some members of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights were among groups calling for abortion coverage.

"To be fair and just to the families of our nation, and to the children who are born to those families, our new, reformed health care system must allow every woman, regardless of age or income, the chance for optimal reproductive health care," RCAR Executive Director Ann Thompson Cook said in a written statement. "The religious leaders of this country -- and the people in the pews -- call for no less."

The mandated abortion coverage, which pro-lifers contend will require funds from all taxpayers, has prompted pro-life opposition.

Clinton is "the one who is forcing employees and employers to pool their resources, their money, their contributions to pay for abortions which they find to be objectionable," said Rep. Chris Smith, R.-N.J. "It is Mr. Clinton who has put health care at risk."

The abortion issue "certainly threatens to slow it down," said Rep. Henry Hyde, R.-Ill.

"If (Clinton) wishes to weigh it down with the albatross of compulsory abortion, I think the president is making his already difficult job much more difficult."

Hyde predicted the White House may back down in the face of opposition from both Democrats and Republicans.

"The administration has shown a very solid streak of pragmatism in dealing with the gay issue in the military," Hyde said, "and I suspect at the end of the day that same pragmatism will obtain on this issue as well."

Pro-choice organizations warned the president not to compromise on abortion.

"President Clinton, I say to you today that America needs your strong, unequivocal leadership to prevent the extreme right from removing women's basic services from the new health care plan," said Kate Michelman, president of the National Abortions Rights Action League.

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Committee begins its study
of SBC theological education

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
9/23/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--A nine-member committee assigned to review the Southern Baptist Convention's approach to theological education began its work Sept. 22 with a 9 a.m.-9 p.m. meeting in Nashville.

Committee chairman David Hankins of Louisiana said most of the day involved input from and discussions with the presidents of the SBC's six seminaries and the executive directors of the SBC Education Commission and Seminary Extension.

A paper was presented to the committee by the seminary presidents, titled "Response of the Seminaries to the Theological Education Study Committee."

The committee was established by the SBC Executive Committee in February and members of the study group were approved at the Executive Committee meeting just prior to the June SBC meeting in Houston.

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Hankins, immediate past chairman of the Executive Committee, described the study committee's initial meeting as "very helpful. All of the seminary presidents were helpful in giving us good background.

"The committee has the task now of processing and analyzing that information," said Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., and a master of divinity and doctor of philosophy graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

The committee will "evaluate what is going on in theological education in SBC life with regard to scope, methodology and funding ... to help develop long-range strategic planning for theological education in SBC life," Hankins said.

The committee will "take a look at the seminaries as a whole," he said, "as opposed to individual seminaries and their individual long-range planning."

Also, the committee will "examine any areas of conflict between the seminaries and other theological entities," Hankins said.

The committee intends to meet again by December, he said; further meetings have not yet been discussed.

"The seminary presidents are a very integral part of this process," Hankins said. "We're depending very heavily on their input, their staffs and resources, to help us come to a conclusion about the long-range future of theological education in SBC life."

Hankins, who was among those who initiated the effort, said the need for a study "kept emerging" in recent years as the Executive Committee faced various issues in theological education, such as New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's pioneering a baccalaureate degree program, and in deliberations by a committee that just completed a study of the SBC's seminary funding formula.

The nine-page paper unanimously adopted by the seminary presidents was described in the initial paragraph as a "congenial response" to the study committee.

Key points in the paper:

-- Southern Baptists historically have had "a primary commitment to quality theological education within the denomination context," the presidents said. They cited the SBC seminary program statement that the seminaries "are Baptist institutions witnessing to the truth revealed in the Holy Scriptures."

-- The seminaries, located in Louisville, Ky.; Fort Worth, Texas; New Orleans; Wake Forest, N.C.; Kansas City, Mo.; and suburban San Francisco, have provided "trained leadership for the churches, the mission fields, and the agencies of the denomination," without Southern Baptists having an "unhealthy dependence upon non-Southern Baptist institutions," the presidents wrote.

-- "No other denomination has developed the pattern of close cooperation experienced among the seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention," they wrote, "nor the relationship of unity and purpose which exists between the seminaries and the denomination." Governance of the seminaries by SBC-elected trustees "should be preserved and protected against compromise or alteration."

-- No "single board of governance" should be created, the presidents wrote, noting separate trustee boards for each seminary "are deeply invested in the life and work ... and are highly committed to the mission and purposes of the schools."

-- No new seminaries are needed, the presidents wrote, maintaining future needs of the SBC can be met by the seminaries and sister SBC institutions working together in a strategy for theological education.

-- Residential campuses with full-time resident faculty and facilities for libraries and other resources offer "the most effective programs of ministerial education," the presidents maintained. They added, "... the experience of studying and living among fellow seminary students -- fellow God-called ministers -- is priceless and powerful."

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-- Off-campus theological education centers, however, are "a necessary and effective means of taking Southern Baptist theological education to those who otherwise would not benefit from such training," the presidents stated. Such centers have "allowed Southern Baptists to reach into the inner cities and rural areas, and to offer essential training to persons from ethnic minorities and language groups."

The presidents pledged: "increased coordination of our (off-campus) programs ... toward a common strategy designed to facilitate optimal cooperation and maximum coverage."

-- "We do not fear the development of alternative institutions of theological education or new quasi-denominational seminaries or divinity schools," the presidents wrote. "We are confident that Southern Baptist churches ... will send their students to us for the quality of theological, biblical, professional, and denominational preparation such students will find only at the six Convention-supported seminaries."

Members of the theological education study committee, in addition to Hankins, are Stan Adamson, professor at Southwest Missouri University in Springfield; Bob R. Agee, president of Oklahoma Baptist University at Shawnee; William E. Bell, dean at Dallas Baptist University; Paul R. House, professor at Taylor University in Hartford City, Ind.; Roy L. Honeycutt, president emeritus of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Ned Lee Matthews, pastor of Parkwood Baptist Church in Gastonia, N.C.; James G. Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church in Snellville, Ga.; and, ex-officio, Fred H. Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., and chairman of the Executive Committee.

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Centrifuge campers give
\$201,000 to missions

Baptist Press
9/23/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--The 36,135 youth and leaders who attended 92 weeks of Centrifuge camps held during the summer of 1993 contributed an average of six dollars each to support four home missions projects.

Campers gave a total of \$201,919.51, an increase of more than \$20,000 from the 1992 offering of \$180,663.27. The number attending Centrifuge camps also increased by 810 from the 35,325 total for 1992.

From the 1993 missions offering, \$70,000 is earmarked for Mississippi River ministry; \$70,000 for disaster relief; \$40,000 for volunteer assistance; and \$20,000 for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's national creative arts team.

Since 1984, Centrifuge campers have given a total of \$1,167,476.02 to home and foreign missions projects.

In addition to missions giving, Centrifuge coordinator Joe Palmer said spiritual decisions were an important part of the summer's program.

A total of 805 campers made professions of faith and 537 committed themselves to full-time Christian service. Another 2,465 rededicated their lives to the Lord and 337 registered other decisions.

Centrifuge is sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship and family development division.

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Oklahoma Baptist staffer
resigns after funds audit

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--The Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma's board of directors, in a formal statement, has disclosed the resignation of Sam Garner, executive director of the convention's family care ministries department, for "improper expenditures of BGCO funds which violated the convention's policy against personal use of convention funds."

The improper expenditures were found in an audit mutually agreed upon by the convention officers and staff and Garner. The board of directors did not disclose the amount of funds involved, but their statement noted, "In all instances, where reimbursement was recommended by the auditor, payment was made by Garner. All funds reviewed by the audit have been accounted for."

The audit indicated no other Oklahoma Baptist convention employee was involved in the handling of the funds, the directors' statement noted.

The directors said they handled the matter in an executive session Sept. 14 and determined "no further action was necessary."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following two paragraphs can be added to (BP) story titled "Newspaper's spin kindles discussion of 'Who's saved?' dated 9/21/93.

-- After the original third-from-last paragraph:

However, the statistical sheet to which Garrison referred -- which was obtained by Baptist Press -- did not identify any denomination as more or less "Christian" than any other, but rather gave membership of Southern Baptists, Catholics and other groups by county.

-- After the original second-from-last paragraph:

Reid replied he did not object to a thorough discussion of the issue of salvation. However, such a sensitive and significant issue, he said, would have been better handled had it been approached in a way that would have "shed more light and less heat."

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "CBF council appoints 6 new missionaries, cites growth," dated 9/17/93, please make the following correction:

Replace paragraph 14, which begins "Parks said ...," with the following paragraph:

"Also, Parks said CBF will purchase some generic missions materials from Woman's Missionary Union, SBC, for CBF use."

Thanks,
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