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S I T U A T I O N R E P O R T

- * Pax Against the Church
- * Polish-Indian Trade Protocol

Pax Against the Church

Poland's Catholic hierarchy reacted strongly against the parliamentary speech of Boleslaw Piasecki, chairman of the Pax Association (Polish Situation Report, Radio Free Europe Research, 28 December 1967). The communique issued by the hierarchy on December 29 (DPA, UPI, AFP all of December 30) was countered by a Pax statement of January 8 (DPA of January 8 and UPI of January 9), and both documents were published in the January 11 issue of the Pax daily Slowo Powszechne.

The hierarchy denied Piasecki's charges that the Church was setting loyalty to the Church against loyalty to the state, commenting that such an accusation "almost sounds like a charge of high treason against the Episcopate."

"The Episcopate takes a public stand only in the indispensable defense of religious life, Catholic education, Catholic culture, and the right of the Catholic institutions to develop, to meet the demands of the believers, and in defense of equal treatment of believers in public life," the communique stated.

"If someone sees in the Church or in the stand of the Episcopate, which defends the just rights of the Church,... a center of political opposition, this is not the Episcopate's fault," the document said, probably having the Party in mind, at least as much as "Pax".

The communique noted that "the attack by Piasescki was launched during a period of relative peace in Church-state relations," when "even non-Catholic members of parliament have not been attacking

11 January 1968

the Episcopate," and went on to say that by "attacking the Episcopate, the Chairman of Pax wants to protect his political interests." This might imply either that Piasecki was attempting to strengthen a weakening Pax position, or that with his attack on the Episcopate, he was striving to win regime support for his plans, formulated in late 1965 and shelved on the Party's insistence, to make Pax the sole Catholic lay organization by means of the incorporation of Znak and the Christian-Social Association. It seems more likely, however, that it was the Party which was the prime mover behind the Pax statement, seeking some criticism of the Church from a lay Catholic group in order to counteract recent speeches by Znak deputies courageously defending the rights of the Church.

Be that as it may, the hierarchy's criticism of Piasecki's speech elicited a statement of the principles of Pax' policy, centering on its approval of the "socialist" basis of the Polish People's Republic, and the belief that only the alliance with the Soviet Union and other "socialist" states could guarantee Polish sovereignty. Therefore, the statement said, efforts towards a reconciliation with Germany were directed only to East Germany. Such efforts could, unfortunately, not be addressed to the West German Episcopate, because the latter supported the government of the Federal Republic, the statement asserted, thus alluding to the letter of the Polish Episcopate to the German hierarchy during the last Vatican Council.

As for the Pax attitude toward the Church, the statement rejected the Episcopate's accusation that Pax had never defended the Church, citing examples of assistance given to churches and priests over the years. Turning to the demand for equal rights for believers in public life, it said that "the truth is that without recognizing the socialist character of the development of our homeland, without collaboration with the people's rule in the field of responsibility for the country's security and development, the formulation of a postulate of 'equal treatment of believers in public life' would end in a vacuum." The hand of the Party seems clear in this statement, as it does in the remark that the Church document had distorted the real freedom enjoyed by the Church in Poland.

On the other hand, the Pax document stated that the association disassociated itself from what it called "very harmful sporadic acts of administrative unlawfulness towards Church institutions," such as the closing of churches and the seizure of Church property by the state. It said these acts were "a social evil as is every disturbance of law." This is an important statement, since, though not directly from the Party or state, it does come from an organization which closely supports the regime. It is thus the first admission on the part of the pro-regime camp that there have been cases of abuses against the Church perpetrated by the authorities.

This is the third open conflict between Pax and the Church. In mid-1955, Pope Pius XII condemned and forbade the reading and diffusion of the Pax weekly Dzis i Jutro, which consequently was closed down about a year later and replaced by the weekly Kierunki.

Polish Situation Report, page 3 11 January 1968

The second conflict flared up in 1964, when it became known that a statement published in the French Catholic press which severely condemned Pax had been written by Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski. Pax then published in its monthly organ Zycie i Mysl (July-August 1964 issue) an open letter to the Cardinal, which, however, in contrast to the present case, was purely defensive in character, although it did state that Pax felt loyal to the Cardinal as a pastor, but opposed his political stand.

Polish-Indian Trade Protocol

Poland and India signed on January 10 in New Delhi a trade protocol for 1968 which foresees a further increase in the exchange of goods between the two countries, Radio Warsaw reported the same day.

Commenting on the agreement from New Delhi, a Reuter dispatch (January 10) stressed that the trade between the two countries had risen rapidly since 1959 and that the new protocol provided for a 50 per cent increase.

The protocol covers the fifth and last year of the five-year Polish-Indian trade agreement (1964-68). India is Poland's most important partner in Southeast Asia, and already in 1963 accounted for 44 per cent of Polish trade with this area.

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It is the third open conflict between Pax and the Church. In 1955, Pope Pius XII condemned and forbade the reading and distribution of the Pax weekly Days of Justice, which consequently was closed down about a year later and replaced by the weekly Przegląd.