

Not in Index

CZE

CS --

ANOTHER ATTACK ON THE VATICAN AND THE POPE

F-598

Munich, 17 August 1982 (RAD/Niznansky)

Official Czechoslovak polemics against the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy's Document of 8 March 1982, which rules that priests should abstain from politics, have been confined so far to the two Catholic weeklies. Now, they have been "secularized." The CPCS-controlled weekly for politics, science, and culture, Tvorba, has published a contribution on the subject by Karel Hruza, head of the Secretariat for Church Affairs at the Office of the Federal Government's Presidium.(1) It is a vehement defense of Pacem in Terris, the pro-regime organization of Catholic clergy, and an equally vehement denunciation of all those "who would like to misuse the religious feelings of our citizens for their own purposes."

According to Hruza, "many Catholic priests" in Czechoslovakia "have taken exception" to the fact that "some gentlemen cardinals have not hesitated to issue in Rome an edict prohibiting priests from participation in peace movements and congregations." These cardinals, Hruza contends, would like to disband Pacem in Terris, because its members "do not agree with the treasonable activity of the exile clergy."

Hruza then as good as charges the Vatican with double morals as regards the political activity of the clergy. While being decidedly against Pacem in Terris, those "gentlemen cardinals in Rome" have failed to curtail the political activity of "a group of clergymen who have been actively helping the so-called Polish Solidarity." On the contrary, the Vatican tolerates the "subversive work of a number of Polish Catholic clergymen." Hruza comes to the conclusion that:

. . . The Vatican allows only those clerical organizations to exist which directly or by proxy mount attacks against socialism, and prohibits those clerical institutions supporting peace and social progress.

To drive the point home, Hruza writes that it was no mere accident that the Holy See decided to disband some "social movements of priests in Latin America" known for their support of national liberation and opposition to "the brutal exploitation of its population by US monopolies." The Vatican, he concludes, is "eminently interested" in the priests' serving, "directly or indirectly," the exploiters, while "refraining on principle" from doing anything that would weaken the US economic supremacy in Latin America.

Karel Hruza's recent contribution in Tvorba ranks among the harshest regime sorties so far against the Vatican in general

---

(1) "On Current Questions of Church Policy in Our Country," No.32, 11 August 1982, pp.4 and 5.

(170)

and Pope John Paul II in particular. (2) It is the third official response to the Congregation for the Clergy's Document within the last four weeks or so. The fact that the response came rather belatedly (the document is dated 8 March 1982) suggests that the document has had a serious impact and therefore forced the regime's hand.

In fact, the document was not permitted to be published in Czechoslovakia, but it did reach believers nevertheless by various ways. (3) The evidently wide knowledge of the document provoked, in early July 1982, a reply in the form of an unsigned letter by Pacem in Terris to Czech and Slovak bishops and ordinaries. That statement implies that there must be some misunderstanding about the document, since members of Pacem in Terris have been loyal to the Church, the pope, and their bishops; and the organization itself is committed solely to preserving peace. (4)

This letter was followed a fortnight later by a statement signed by "The Secretariats for Church Affairs at the Ministries of Culture of the Czech and Slovak Socialist Republic." (5) It refers to the World Conference of Church Representatives in Moscow last May, and notes the absence there of Czechoslovak bishops who had allegedly been "forbidden by the Vatican" to attend. The reason for this, it is argued, must be seen "in a broader context." This "broader context" is said to be a "discussion" about the Congregation for the Clergy's Document, which is allegedly considered by some as "curtailing or even prohibiting the Catholic clergy from any commitment to the preservation of peace and progress" in the world. In this discussion, the statement continues, "many Western communications media hasten to the aid of views and standpoints designed to discredit Church-State relations" in Czechoslovakia. Based on the Congregation for the Clergy's Document, attacks were said to have been launched against Pacem in Terris. The Church secretariats consider it "absurd" that the "Vatican center" should be preventing Czech and Slovak Catholic clergy from working for the "preservation of the human race." The statement ends by praising Pacem in Terris

- (2) An earlier vicious attack on the pope was launched by the Slovak CP daily Pravda. See "Antisocialist Divine Services -- What the Catholic Church in Poland Is Striving for," Pravda, 5 July 1982, p.6.
- (3) The Czech Primate, Frantisek Cardinal Tomasek has reportedly informed his clergy quite openly about the Document's contents while samizdat copies have been circulated in Slovakia.
- (4) See Katolicke Noviny (Bratislava) No.28, 11 July 1982, pp.1 and 3; and Katolicke Noviny (Prague), No.28, pp.1 and 4. The case was discussed in Czechoslovak Situation Report/14, Radio Free Europe Research, 27 July 1982, Item 1.
- (5) Katolicke Noviny (Prague and Bratislava) No.30, 25 July 1982, p.1.

(None)



for its commitment in aid of "humanitarian goals" and reiterates that all Churches in Czechoslovakia will continue to have "room for religious work as stipulated in the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic." (6)

It is well enough known that this room for religious activity, as defined in the constitution and the Church laws of 1949, is none too large. Czechoslovak Church policy is widely believed to be the most repressive in the whole socialist bloc. Hruza's definition of the "main guidelines" of Czechoslovakia's policy toward Churches itself is rather indicative. He concedes, in his article, the citizen's "right to profess any religion" and at the same time his right to "propagate the atheistic Weltanschauung." Propagation of religion by ordinary citizens is not tolerated.

It will not escape the observer's attention that the official Czechoslovak method of handling the Congregation for the Clergy's Document is reminiscent of the treatment of Charter 77. The regime has taken the field against a declaration which the general public is officially not acquainted with. As for the thrust of the polemic, the mission of Pacem in Terris has conveniently been confined to the noble aim of preserving peace. The argument seems to run that whoever is against Pacem in Terris is against peace. Bending the truth a little is not frowned upon, as, for example, when Hruza argues that "all newly appointed bishops have been not only members, but also high officials of the Peace Movement of the Catholic Clergy," and mentions by name Frantisek Cardinal Tomasek, and Bishops Josef Vrana of Olomouc, Julius Gabris of Trnava, Jozef Feranec of Banska Bystrica, and Jan Pasztor of Nitra. He neglects to say that the Peace Movement was, in many respects, an organization quite different from Pacem in Terris. It was from its ranks, in 1968, that the provisional Action Committee of Catholic priests emerged that eventually created the reformist Cause of Council Revival under the chairmanship of the then Bishop Tomasek. Pacem in Terris is, in this sense, not a direct successor to the Peace Movement but a creation of the "normalization and consolidation." At the same time, Hruza "forgot" to explain why none of the dignitaries he mentioned are among the Pacem in Terris members.

Any argumentation confined to the "peaceful" mission of Pacem in Terris blissfully neglects the fact that it is also, and foremost, a faithful executor of the state's Church policy. Though only about half of all priests in the CSSR are organized in Pacem in Terris, the organization exercises control over the entire clergy, the clerical institutions, the religious press, etc. Incidentally, Hruza's allegation that the Vatican would like to disband Pacem in Terris does not hold up, precisely because it is an organization controlled by the state, rather than by the Church.

- 
- (6) Article 32 of the constitution stipulates: "Freedom of religion is guaranteed. Everyone can profess any belief he chooses, or be without creed, and can perform religious acts as long as this is not in conflict with the law."

(10)

CS (3) -- ANOTHER ATTACK ON THE VATICAN AND THE POPE

F-601

As for Hruza's invectives against the Vatican and the pope personally, they are neither new nor original. Nevertheless, some of them should be put on record:

It is known that the American President, during his June sojourn in Rome, enjoined Pope John Paul II to assume a "more resolute posture" in connection with the situation in Poland, to interfere more into the internal affairs of that country. "As a reward," Ronald Reagan has shown his readiness to raise financial support, which the Roman Catholic Church would distribute among the opposition in Poland. Reagan, at the same time, asked the pope to "restrain" Catholic clergymen active in peace movements. (7)

There is little that need be added to this. The construed "Vatican-imperialism," or "Vatican-USA" conspiracy recalls all too vividly some aspects of the notorious trials of Church dignitaries in the 1950s.

- end -

1525/82/11/1