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Draft Laws with Anti-Church Overtones

The Sejm closed its sessions on July 15 with the passage of seven new draft laws, a number of which should qualitatively reduce the legal position of the Catholic Church with respect to properties in the Recovered Territories, religious instruction, schools and public cash collections for Church purposes.

One of the draft laws grants to the state the ownership of all public properties recovered from the Germans in the Western Territories. This would include some three thousand churches as well as parish houses, seminaries, cloisters, hospitals, etc. The Church/State dispute has been going on for several years with respect to the legal ownership of these properties. It would seem now that the regime wants to face the Church with a fait accompli as regards legal title to these properties.

The latter of course places in the hands of the regime a wide range of weapons to be used in a number of ways against the Church, specifically in the Western Territories, but also in the country at large. By declaring itself owner, the regime on the local level can subject each parish and priest to various forms of blackmail. There need not be a uniformity, for example, in the "rent" which the regime might charge an individual parish. It could be a mere symbolic sum or an impossible amount. This could be determined of course by the degree of "cooperation" with the regime an individual priest was willing to exercise. This kind of treatment possibly could develop into a wedge which the regime would try to drive between priests and the Episcopate, a highly desirable objective from the regime's point of view.

The regime could, of course, exercise outright expropriation in particularly stubborn areas but would of course run the danger of local unrest similar to Zielona Gora. Increased harassment of the Church on this issue is very likely and is bound to increase Church-State tensions.

According to Olsen in the NYT, the "Znak" group of five deputies voted against this bill, while even "Pax" abstained (two votes) and the three Frankowski deputies absented themselves from the voting. The draft school reform bill forbids religious instruction in public schoolrooms and requires that children should be taught a scientific Weltanschauung. It may be expected that the regime will more strictly insist on increased Marxist content in University courses. Here once again the "Znak" deputies offered vain opposition (by abstention) to the legislation. (see Zimmerer). The Sejm's action outlawing religious instruction on public school premises is a

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intent of the
is a legalization of the/January resolution on the subject at the seventh
PUWP CC plenum.

A third draft law requiring regime authorization for the holding of public cash collections, with the exception of those "for purposes of worship", was returned to committee at the insistence of the "Znak" group. "Znak" delegates demanded that the correct formulation should be "for ecclesiastical purposes", presumably to allow for a more flexible distribution of the funds collected. The bill's return to committee was described by Wetz of "Le Monde" as a "surprise". He wrote that, although it could not be foreseen in what sense the bill would be revised, it was clear that the influence of public opinion was not without significance "in such a delicate matter". Another draft bill requires "documentation" of all building materials for non-socialist construction, showing just where they came from. Since the construction of churches is a non-socialist undertaking, and since the Church is not always averse to using building materials of dubious origin, it should be somewhat more difficult to get Churches built in Poland in the future, still another potential source for increased tensions.

The Sejm also confirmed the appointment of Wlodzimierz Lechowicz to the post of chairman of the Committee for Small Crafts Industries. Lechowicz gives up his position of editor-in-chief of "Kurier Polski", the Democratic Party daily.

Trade Agreements

On July 13 Hsinhua reported the signing of a Polish-Mongolian economic agreement in Ulan Bator. On the same day Reuter announced that a goods and payments agreement between Poland and China had been signed in Warsaw. Under the agreement Poland is to deliver to China coal mining equipment, fertilizer plants, locomotives, lathes and excavators and to import from China ores and minerals, textile equipment, textiles and consumer goods.

North Vietnamese Government Delegation

A North Vietnamese government delegation headed by Premier Pham Van Dong was received at the Warsaw airport by Cyrankiewicz yesterday. The Vietnamese have lately visited the CSSR.