

Church Affairs - New Law on Public Meetings

Against the opposition of four Znak deputies, with five abstentions of Catholic members of the Pax and Christian Social Association groups, and after the walk-out of about half of the 38 non-party deputies, the Polish Sejm passed a law on public meetings on March 30. While Radio Warsaw reported on the negative votes and on abstentions, as well as on opposition speeches of Konstanty Lubienski, the Znak spokesman, RFE learned about the walk-out of non-Party deputies from Stehle, FAZ March 31.

Since the text of the new law is not available yet, it is difficult to assess the extent of limitations of religious freedom imposed by the Sejm decision. However, the behavior of the non-party deputies seems to leave no room for doubt that these are essential ones. The best informed at this moment seems to be "Il Popolo", March 31, from which the following passages are quoted:

"The law says that all meetings and assemblies organized by the state, political organizations, and trade unions have no need of previous authorization, whereas other forms of meetings -- and explicit reference is made to processions and pilgrimages -- cannot be held without the approval of authorities, requested three days beforehand. There is no need for authorization for masses and other types of religious services held inside the churches or just outside churches or chapels open for worship."

"In the case of pilgrimages, says the new law, there must be a clear indication of the route to be followed and the means of transportation to be used by the faithful. In any event, no use can be made, at religious meetings, of loudspeakers, megaphones, etc., without special permission."

The day before the new law was passed, Reuter reported that Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski sent a new letter to the Marshal of the Sejm, demanding the establishment of a special commission to investigate the conditions of state-Church relations. The letter was reportedly discussed at the Polish bishops' conference held on March 15 after Cardinal Wyszynski's return from Rome (cf. Situation Report March 23).

"Il Popolo", again better informed on the subject, stressed on March 30 that the Cardinal reproached in his new letter the tone which

was used by Czeslaw Wycech, the Marshall of the Sejm, in the latter's answer to the previous letter of the Cardinal (cf. Situation Report February 19), a tone "not worthy of a personage who should be above polemics since he heads the most important legislative body."

(A detailed analysis of the material available at this moment on the subject of public meetings is being prepared by RFE.)

More on Rapacki Plan

Upon his return to Warsaw on March 31 from Geneva, Adam Rapacki stated that the majority of the delegations (to the disarmament conference) have a positive attitude to his plan, and that "there is no such delegation which would straightaway refuse to discuss" the Polish proposals.

(A short outline of the development and/or modifications of the Plan is being prepared by RFE.)

Polish-US Relations

The American Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, Frank James Welch, arrived in Warsaw for a few days' visit, Radio Warsaw reported March 31. During his stay in Poland Mr. Welch will visit several agricultural institutes and enterprises.

A medical research agreement was signed between Poland and the USA, Felix Belair reported in the New York Times April 2. Under the agreement, which has been concluded for five years, the US will finance a 2,000,000 dollar medical research program by Polish and American scientists on ten laboratory projects. Belair stressed that this is the first such undertaking with an Iron Curtain country.

William Louis Brett, an American businessman who was arrested for violating currency regulations (cf. Situation Report March 8), will go on trial in Warsaw on April 8, UPI reported March 30.

Surplus Goods Exchange Agreements

Agreements on exchange of "market surplus" goods were signed "lately" between the USSR and Hungary, Radio Warsaw reported on March 31. Negotiations on similar agreements with other socialist countries will be completed soon, the broadcast added.

The agreements are pure barter deals, and they are made independently and out of normal trade agreements.

Polish-Rumanian Scientific Technical Cooperation

A protocol of the 12th Session of the Polish-Rumanian Commission on Scientific Technical Cooperation was signed in Bucharest March 30, Radio Warsaw reported the next day. Under the agreement Rumanian experts will be trained in Polish chemical, coal mining, machine and shipbuilding industry, while Polish experts will study in the Rumanian oil, gas, building material and timber industry.

Stress on Exports

This time it is Stefan Jedrychowski, Chairman of the State Planning Commission, who has spoken upon exports. In an interview published in all Warsaw newspapers on March 29, he said that Poland "had already amended the investment plan for the current five years to accommodate it to the needs of foreign trade", Reuter reported on the same date. Referring to the agricultural policy of the Common Market countries (cf. Situation Report March 23), Jedrychowski stated that "Poland must change the structure of its exports, increasing the proportion of machinery and industrial products."

In the above connection, please note G. Sterner's Background Report "Poland Opts for Dollars" released March 30.