

Church-State

German correspondents stationed in Warsaw, as well as other foreign press reports, continue to focus their attention on Church problems which came to light in connection with the alleged last-minute withdrawal of a pastoral letter (cf. Situation Report, September 26). Some reliable but as yet not fully confirmed reports state that the pastoral letter has in fact been read in some churches after all. By now, it seems that because of the unofficial disclosure the pastoral letter assumed greater significance and publicity than would have perhaps otherwise been the case. Latest in the series of "background information" on the smoldering Church-State conflict are two articles in La Libre Belgique, September 30 and October 1-2 (cf. Telex) and further correspondence by Stehle in the FAZ today (English translation will follow). Both reports contribute a valid appraisal of the situation insofar as evaluation of facts known permits. Briefly noted, the recent deterioration of the Church-State sector could be summarized as follows. Earlier this year the talks in the mixed commission made up of representatives of the Church and of the regime were reported to have proceeded in a conciliatory atmosphere raising hopes of peaceful relations between the Church and government. The events at Nowa Huta and Zielona Gora brought about an abrupt suspension of the meetings of the mixed commission. It is said that Politburo member Z. Kliszko on May 25 opposed the continuation of the commission's work. Moreover, a stiffening of the regime policy is attributed to J. Sztachelski's (Minister Without Portfolio for Denominational Affairs) visit to Moscow. Some reports have it that a "two year plan of anti-Church campaign" has been worked out in detail and put into operation, instead of a new agreement between the Church and the regime. Whatever the veracity of these reports, the fact remains that a concentrated campaign against the Church is definitely in evidence. In the first place, by means of fiscal measures the regime is attempting to undermine the Church materially and deprive her of means to carry out her activities. Clerical seminaries have been ordered to pay alleged arrears of taxes which are so calculated that it would be quite impossible to pay them. This reportedly led already to the closing down of some seminaries such as those at Gorzow and Slupsk in the Western Territories. A similar device has been applied to every source of Church income derived from fees for christenings, weddings, funerals and the like. Some 60% of these fees is taken over by the regime. Special taxes have also to be paid by Church institutions and priests occupying a hall or dwelling larger than that defined as "dwelling space for one person."

An even more serious aspect has the regime policy toward teaching of religion. Many teachers of religion in the elementary and middle schools have not yet received permission to teach their subject during the school year which has just started. The directors of schools in the countryside, following instructions from higher authority are putting all kinds of obstacles before the priests to prevent them carrying out this function. One of these obstacles is a change of tactics relating to parents' attitude to religious teaching. Up to 1959 it was the responsibility of parents who did not wish their children to receive religious instruction to make an appropriate application to the local authorities. Now the contrary applies. It is the responsibility of parents who want their children taught religion to make an application. As far as higher Catholic education is concerned, the offensive tactics of dialectical materialism are to be expressed in the shape of obligatory study of Marxism-Leninism in clerical seminaries, under the control of inspectors specially appointed for that purpose by the regime. The Catholic university in Lublin is the object of particular interest to the regime. For a number of years this university has been burdened with taxes which cannot possibly be paid.

Parallel with these already put into effect or as yet merely threatening measures, the regime is intensifying also its own "positive" campaign. The once discredited activity of "patriotic priests" is now again being revived in the so-called "Caritas circles of clergy", a charitable organization taken over from the Church. All in all, the regime is deploying tactics which play off the lower clergy against the Church hierarchy and especially against the Episcopate. The press has also renewed the use of previous methods of attacking individuals among the clergy, accusing them of alleged ill-treatment of children in schools, criminal offenses, immoral private life and so forth. Even Czestochowa, the place of annual pilgrimage of hundreds of thousands of Poles, has become the object of vitriolic attack. In connection with anti-Church propaganda a more active and vocal role is assumed by the "Society of Free Thinkers and Atheists" and the lavish publication of such periodicals as Argumenty, Wolna Mysl, Fakty i Mysl, Wychowanie and others. Even the Polish radio has been dragged into the campaign against the Church. The network maintains what is known as a "Center for Testing Public Opinion" which keeps organizing polls particularly among young people concerning their attitude towards the Church. The tendentious character of these opinion polls is obvious.



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Whether, as Stehle would have it, the withdrawal of the pastoral letter was "a shot that did not hit the mark" only future developments will prove. The area of conflict as outlined above is extensive enough for both sides to see fit, or be compelled to, compromise further, if only for the sake of "national unity" which Gomulka needs not only while away in New York but primarily when he returns back home.

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(1) Zycie Gospodarcze (September 25) J. Wachowicz "The Yields and the Harvest" (an analysis of the 1960 harvest); (2) Zycie Warszawy (September 21) D. Horodynski "Poles and Germans" (on good neighborly relations); (3) Mysl Wolna (August 1960) M. Zloczowski "So That They May Be Proud" (anti-Church tirade).