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Background Report
(Hungar. Research)

POSITION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN HUNGARY SINCE THE
REVOLUTION

General Introduction

The October revolution demanded among other things complete religious freedom for the Roman Catholic Church. This, however, was only partly realized because of the Russian intervention of November 4.

The revolution freed Cardinal Jozsef NEMDSZENTY and many hundreds of innocent clerics who had been imprisoned. Civilian government representatives vanished from the bishopric offices. The Cardinal liquidated the "peace priest" movement and inflicted ecclesiastical punishment on the "peace priests". All over the country Catholic parents demanded the introduction of religious instruction in schools and many subsequently registered their children for this.

But the freedom achieved did not last long. As the power of the KADAR government increased it took one step after another to suspend the revolutionary achievements of the Catholic Church.

Attacks on the Cardinal

At the end of November 1956, the State Office for Church Affairs published through Radio BUDAPEST a statement that the 23 October 1956 conditions were valid for relations between Church and State. The announcement said:

The State Office for Church Affairs informs the public that the worker-peasant government, according to the constitution of the People's Republic, stands on the basis of free religious worship. It ensures henceforth facilitative religious instruction in schools and holds as binding the agreement concluded with the Churches according to the 23 October 1956 conditions.

It wishes to settle questions arising between the State and Churches in the future too by negotiations and agreements.

(Hungarian Monitoring, 27 November 1956)

After this publication of the State Office for Church Affairs comparative calm followed. It was only in February 1957 that the KADAR government felt itself strong enough to continue the attacks against the Church. These were aimed in the first place against Cardinal NEMDSZENTY and sought to prove his "counter-

-revolutionary" character.

MINDSENYI did not serve the true national interests of the Hungarian people but found common cause with the interests of international imperialism and tried to help the realization of plans which, if successful, would have plunged the country into catastrophe.

("Hepesztóság" 30 January 1957)

After attacks lasting for a whole month, the government thought the time ripe to place the person of Cardinal MINDSENYI beyond the law.

On 4 November 1956 MINDSENYI entered the building of the HUNGARIAN US Legation, where he still is, therefore he resides extra-territorially. Jozsef MINDSENYI is under legal sentence and at the same time took a stand with the counter-revolution in his radio speech made on November 3, incited against the people's democratic order although he has no right whatever to take measures in questions regarding the State and the Catholic Church. In spite of this he issued on November 5, 6 and on subsequent dates from the American legation decrees in which he removed ecclesiastical persons of progressive and democratic views from their public activities and expelled them from the territory of HUNGARY. These decrees are of a positive political character, striking at the leaders of a progressive movement, the peace movement of the Catholic clergy. These decrees are in opposition to the agreement concluded between the State and the Catholic Church and the position taken by the Bench of Bishops, expounded in various declarations and infringing the laws of the State.

In consequence, Jozsef MINDSENYI is no longer allowed to carry out Church functions in Hungary. Therefore, according to the standpoint of the government, the carrying out of MINDSENYI's orders is considered as an act contrary to the law.

(Hungarian Monitoring, 9 March 1957)

Simultaneous with the attacks aimed at the Cardinal, the government took under its protection the "peace priests" affected by ecclesiastical punishment.

These priests who have been relieved of their offices because of their progressive views are taken under the protection of the State Office for Church Affairs which wishes to solve their problems.

("Heti Hírlap" 24 February 1957)

Religious Instruction in Schools

The government also started a campaign to cut religious instruction down to its pre-revolutionary framework. "Nepszabadsag" reported from a "Party day" held at TATABANYA:

Women from TATABANYA sharply attacked events taking place in connection with religious instruction. Some people interfere incessantly with those children whose parents did not enter them for religious instruction.

("Nepszabadsag", 30 January 1957)

In fact, the BUDAPEST daily attacked Gyula KISS, Deputy Minister of Education, because he signed an instruction assuring schoolchildren the chance to attend religious instruction. ("Nepszeker" 26 January 1957)

However, the attack on religious instruction created such chaos that the government was compelled to make new regulations.

According to decree 21/1957 (III.34) religious instruction is not compulsory in schools. In fact, the full force of the law was to be applied against those who used religious instruction for political purposes aimed against the Hungarian People's Republic, its economic or social order. ("Magyar Keziny" 24 March 1957.)

After this, the Minister of Public Education hastened to regulate religious instruction in schools by a new directive. ("Sajtó Érték" 22 May 1957.)

These decrees, although assuring the facultative character of religious instruction, re-established the pre-23 October 1956 situation, when the local Party organizations did everything in their power to impede religious instruction.

Naturally these instructions were insufficient to dispense the chaos which had arisen over religious instruction. The pressure of public opinion forced the government to introduce some kind of moral instruction "based on Communist principles" within the framework of classes held by the foremanagers.

The "Peace Priests"

Before 23 October 1956, the government was much helped in its fight against the Church by the "peace priests" who held different ecclesiastical positions. When Cardinal HINDENBURG purged these positions of priests who co-operated with the Communist Party, the revolutionary worker-peasant government was forced to seek further possibilities of placing in leading ecclesiastical positions priests who sympathized with the Party. For this reason, the government re-introduced

the right of patronage, exercised by heads of the Hungarian Government for centuries, but renounced in the constitution of the People's Republic in 1946.

It is necessary for the enforcement of State sovereignty in the questions of ecclesiastical appointments to secure State interests. Therefore the Presidential Council of the People's Republic calls into being the following decree of legal force. (Statutory Regulation No.22,1957.)

Within the territory of the Hungarian People's Republic all appointments for Roman Catholic ecclesiastical positions and titles and those appointments which, according to Church laws, belong to the sphere of authority of the Pope, in addition to permission to act in those capacities must be previously approved by the Presidential Council of the People's Republic. This rule must also be applied in the case of removals and transfers.

(*"Nagykor" Ecology*, 24 March 1957.)

Negotiations on settling questions of State and Church started at the beginning of the year between the Hungarian Bench of Bishops and government representatives. The government representatives tried to force the Bench of Bishops to make a statement condemning the October revolution. The statement of the Bench of Bishops, however, only "supports the Hungarian Government's endeavor to secure the welfare of the people and to further peace in our country and in the world." (*"Nepesbetség"*, 11 April 1957.)

During the negotiations the possibility of the revival of the Catholic peace movement was also raised. When there was no other way out, the Hungarian Bench of Bishops passed a resolution on the Roman Catholic Church's participation in the peace movement.

Following the instructions of Christ's terrestrial representative -- here we mean in the first place the instructions given in the Pope's Easter Message -- we take a stand, at the dawn of the atomic era, for the sparing and saving of mankind. We urge especially that the responsible leaders of the large nations and the UN intervene for the final elimination and effectual ban of weapons causing mass-destruction and final annihilation of mankind.

(*"Nepesbetség"*, 24 May 1957.)

To carry out general peace tasks and ecclesiastical peace work the Bunch of Bishops, jointly with the National Peace Council, formed the Catholic Committee of the National Peace Council, the "Opus Pacis". By the creation of the Opus Pacis, the Hungarian Bunch of Bishops took into its own hands the direction of the peace movement which is a safeguard that the organization will not carry out activities contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. It also makes it possible for Catholics to join this ecclesiastical peace movement instead of the peace movement of the government.

After the statement of the Bunch of Bishops, the National Peace Committee of Catholic Priests announced that it was joining forces with Opus Pacis. ("Nepszabadsag", 7 June 1957.)

The Opus Pacis movement was not condemned officially by the Vatican, but the latter noted that the Hungarian Bunch of Bishops did not create this Catholic peace movement of its own free will but at the pressure of the Hungarian Government.

The Campaign Goes On

During the negotiations between the State and the Church the KIMR government did not think it necessary to cease its attacks against the Church. The papers almost constantly continued their accusations against ecclesiastical personalities. For example, "Szegedi Naplaj", official organ of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in county Szeged, sharply attacked the priests of that county and accused them of breaking the agreements made between the State and the Church. ("Szegedi Naplaj", 17 and 31 July 1957.)

Government organs prevented traditional Easter, Rogation Day, Corpus Christi and St. Stephen Day processions.

In its campaign against the Church, the KIMR government started to arrest and intern ecclesiastics under the pretext of "participation in the counter-revolution".

Istvan FIDES, a Benedictine monk, was sentenced to life imprisonment. (Hungarian Monitoring, 25 May 1957.) The county Győr court passed the death sentence on László MINISZTERI, parish priest of NGZ. ("Nepszabadsag", 25 August 1957.)

"Szepesbányag" reported on August 1 a statement by the Ministry of the Interior's Information Department on the unmasking of a "large ecclesiastical counter-revolutionary group". Istvan TÁRSÓTI, student of theology, László WÁRSNY and Antal KUCSÁK, priests, and Albert Egon TUKORÁNYI, pensioned priest, were arrested. ("Szepesbányag", 1 August 1957.)

According to Katzipress (21 August 1957) Bishop SZABALIK of VERSENYES and Bishop FÜTÖSI of VÁS, who were released during the revolution, were removed from their seats and interned at ERŐS.

This series of arrests proves that the KADAR government will increase its attacks against the Catholic Church. A specially strong attack is to be expected in the near future as a result of the recently-published Papal decree by which in Hungary clerics may not take up any kind of political activity and by which, if such persons do not give up their political activities within a month, they will be excommunicated.

End.