

Reza Baberwand

I CURT - H - HUNGARIAN PRIESTS ARRESTED

Budapest, February 7 -- The Hungarian Ministry of the Interior announced on February 7 that eight Roman Catholic priests and clerics, a former countess and a former officer of the Hungarian SS Panzer Grenadiere (a voluntary Hungarian-speaking body of troops recruited in the late days of the war to fight with the German SS) have been arrested for taking part in an alleged conspiracy against the state for/indemnity consulting boys attracted to their care.
/former also/

It is interesting to note that the announcement comes from the Ministry of the Interior, not from the police or the public prosecutor's office as would be normal. On the 24th of November 1958, for instance, a Catholic priest, Soltan Bolcseregi, was arrested on a charge of having committed an indecent offense, but in the official announcement the Budapest Headquarters of the Civil Police was given as the arresting authority. The wording of the present announcement that these people were arrested by "organs of the Ministry of the Interior" is the first important evidence since the revolution that the successors of the AVH are back at work as an autonomous body.

Associations of indecent behaviour have been standard tactics for the past seven months. They are designed to blacken the clergy's reputation, and it is of some significance that in four cases out of six the Catholic priests were accused of having committed an indecent offense against altar boys. The implication here is that not only is it unwise for parents to send children to religious instruction and church, but that it is also dangerous. It would appear from one of the provincial papers ("Fajerdogyet Hirtelo", Nov. 13, 1960) that the government's new penal code, now under officially stipulated discussion, has been hushhanded to religious propaganda, because it stipulates new and harsher punishments to discourage this type of offense.

In cases such as the present one government propaganda aims at showing that corruption of the body and perversion of mind are two facets of the same guilty disposition. Priests who conspire against the People's Democracy, or are simply over-zealous in representing the Christian case, are also corrupted in the flesh, using religion as a pretext for perverted indulgence of the flesh. They are also usually portrayed as being excessively and disgustingly fat, or of a lean, suspicious and choleric character. Such men are dangerous, and the message that is being plugged for the benefit of parents is that if such are the servants of God, the Church itself could do with a reappraisal.

The fact that the present group includes, besides the priests, a former countess and a former officer of the Hungarian SS, is an obvious attempt to bring the clergy into public dispute by putting an equation mark between the Church and the aristocracy, and the Church and Nazism. The technique is a standard one throughout Eastern Europe: in Hungary the last phase of the collectivization of agriculture may have added one impetus to the government's campaign against the Churches. The Budapest announcement says that three people were "leaders" of a conspiracy and this would seem to indicate that other arrests and possibly a show trial may follow.

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What is actually expected of the Hungarian Catholic clergy if they are to stay within the favor of the government has been put with almost brutal frankness by Hungary's leading peace priest, the renegade Miklos Berenyi in Excellence Day - Jan. 8, 1961.

He wrote:

"The new year makes it imperative for every priest of conscience to clarify in his mind what sort of a political and social stand he wants to take. He was so confused by saying that he has not been able to reach this stage. For an intelligent person, used to examining questions of his conscience, there has been plenty of time and experience in this field. This new stand which he must take also means that false, illegal and crazy actions must be avoided and made impossible."

It would be difficult to think of a clearer warning. The political police and the apostate clergy are back in proud and open leagues.

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