

EAST -- HEAD OF THE STATE OFFICE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS CONDOMOR
 FACITRE VIKOS

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Munch, 22 November 1982 (RAD/Raischi)

Dr. Gyula Nagy, an auxiliary bishop and professor at the Lutheran theological Academy, was unanimously elected Bishop of Hungary's Northern Lutheran Church Synod on 31 August 1982, replacing Dr. Erno Otilik who retired from the post this summer at the age of 78. (1) The new bishop was installed on September 25 in Budapest by Dr. Istvan Kaldy, head bishop of the Hungarian Lutheran Church, in the presence of Imre Miklos, State Secretary and Chairman of the State Office for Religious Affairs. (2)

As it turns out from delayed information, Miklos used this opportunity to launch an attack against demonstrations of pacifism among believers in Hungary. In his address he stated that Hungary's Presidential Council had given with confidence its agreement to the selection of Dr. Nagy, a man in the service of social progress who, like Bishop Kaldy for the past 25 years, would do everything to develop further good relations between the Hungarian state and the Lutheran Church. He recalled the 1948 agreement between the two parties, the "difficult circumstances" under which Dr. Kaldy had assumed his post in 1948, and the joint efforts made since then to overcome many difficulties on the basis of actual confidence and good will. (3)

After the good news, Miklos spelled out the bad, complaining that

from time to time, amid the Hungarian Churches as well, certain religious and lay personalities and groups, under the influence of cold-war forces, are attempting to express their hostile feelings toward socialist society in a religious disguise. The leaders of these schismatic groups are arbitrarily explaining dogmatic tenets and non-existent articles of faith; consciously misinterpreting the rights spelled out in the Constitution and passing over the obligations [in it] in silence; they mislead well-intentioned but inexperienced young people and encourage them to refuse [to perform] military service.

Miklos then took aim at recent demonstrations of pacifism in Hungary, claiming that

we are witnessing attempts by which the propagators of tendentially spread pacifist ideas are also using the teachings of the Churches to expand the possibilities of acquiring influence. Exalting the general slogans of pacifism, they mislead the people's natural desire for peace and instead of [making] true efforts for peace, they mislead honest people with the illusion of peace.

(1) See Hegyessy, 31 August 1982; and Evangelikus Elet, 3 September 1982.

(2) Evangelikus Elet, 10 October 1982.

(3) Ibid., 17 October 1982.

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According to Miklos, all rational people who love their country know that an army is needed to defend it; moreover, it is false to say that all armies are identical. "Nevertheless," he complained, "certain people are offering the ideas of pacifism to the socialist countries."

Miklos also referred to others "who distort the freedom of conscience and religion achieved in Hungary and spread false statements about the opportunities of the Churches and about the Church leaders," with "foreign hostile circles" doing their best to use these allegations against the Hungarian state. According to Miklos, the vast majority of the leading bodies, clergy, and faithful of Hungary's Churches "are keeping their distance from these attempts and are taking a resolute stand against them," in order to strengthen good relations and mutual confidence between the state and the Churches.

On the other hand, Miklos firmly rejected the views of those who describe the state's Church policy as a "model": "we will not allow any mystification or misinterpretation of our Church policy and in the future will solve the still existing problems or eventual tensions in an atmosphere of good partnership, through discussion and joint efforts." (4)

Miklos's outburst against conscientious objectors and pacifist views among members of the Churches -- he did not single out any specific Church -- are indicative of the growing concern of the government that these ideas may spread among the faithful, especially young people. Pacifist views first emerged in the mid-1970s among some of the small Catholic basic communities. The communities are against military conscription and are seeking a civilian alternative to military service. They are pacifist and follow the nonviolent philosophy of Gandhi and Martin Luther King. (5) In a leaflet distributed on August 4 in Budapest to members of Peace March 81, two Hungarian dissidents -- writer Miklos Haraszti and architect László Rajk -- stated that "at any one time, more than 100 young Hungarians are serving heavy prison sentences for trying to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed freedom of conscience by refusing military service -- and the law provides no possibility for any civil, social alternative to military service." (6) Both the state and the Catholic Church hierarchy have been worried, albeit for different reasons, by this new development. (7)

(4) All quotes are from ibid..

(5) See Ferenc Kosszegi, "The Making of the New Peace Movement in Hungary," in Ferenc Kosszegi and E.P. Thompson, The New Hungarian Peace Movement (London: European Nuclear Disarmament and The Merlin Press, Ltd, 1983) especially p. 12f.

(6) See Hungarian Situation Report/13, Radio Free Europe Research, 7 September 1983, Item 3. Alternative civilian service is available in Hungary only to small religious groups (Nazarenes, Jehovah's Witnesses) and there is no precedent for such service being offered to mainline denominations.

(7) On how the Catholic Church is trying to deal with this problem, see Hungarian SR/16, SPER, 19 October 1983, Item 7; see also Steven Polgar, "The THIRD Issue of 'Naszalo' Appears in Hungary," SAD Background Report/239 (Hungary), SPER, 16 November 1983, final pp. 7-11.

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Even more recently, a new peace movement has begun to emerge in Hungary, in the form of small cell-groups in various universities, and secondary and trade schools. It has found growing support among young people between the ages of 14 and 20 and is steadily gaining momentum, with some input from pacifist activists in the West. (8) Thus, when the British pacifist Professor E.P. Thompson was not able to give a lecture on "The 'Normalisation' of Europe" in a public place to be provided by Hungary's official National Peace Council, he did manage to deliver it in the private apartment of dissident writer György Konrad in Budapest on 23 September 1982. (9)

From the tone of Miklos's complaints, it is obvious that the government is increasingly perturbed by the spread of pacifist views among believers and would like to receive increased support from their bishops in containing the movement.

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(8) See Ferenc Koryegi and E.P. Thompson, op.cit., and Dan Fisher, "Hungary's Dissidents Find Regime is Mostly Tolerant," Los Angeles Times, 18 November 1982.

(9) See Koryegi and Thompson, op.cit., pp. 35-36, and The Guardian, 25 October 1982.