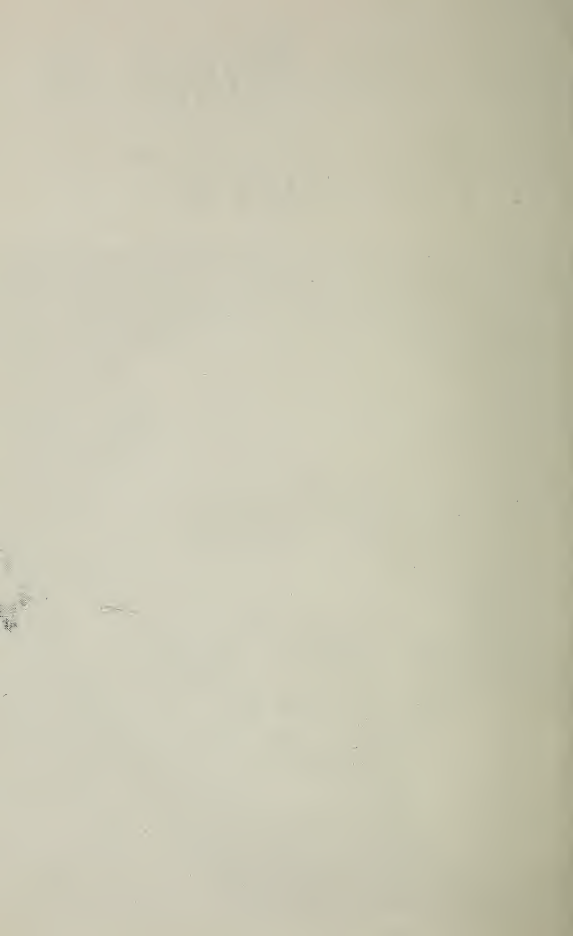


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How Are Things in Tito - Slavia?





HOW ARE THINGS IN TITO-SLAVIA?

by

RICHARD GINDER



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RICHARD GINDER

“I did not come here to ask any favor for myself. I came because you sent for me. You have taken me out of the prison for a purpose. Let me remind you what I stand for: I insist upon freedom for all the people. You have given no signs that you intend to respect the Constitution. I am going to resist you on every move in which you disregard the Constitution and the people . . .”

Brave words — spoken by a defenseless citizen to a ruthless dictator: “I insist upon freedom for all the people!” On one side of the desk, a tall Christlike man, armed only with a good conscience and the loyalty of thousands of friends — Aloysius Stepinac, Archbishop of Zagreb; on the other side of the desk, Josef Tito, Moscow-trained overlord of prisons and concentration camps, head of the army and spy-corps, Stalin’s deputy for Yugoslavia.



What would you do if you had been in Tito's place, confronted with so fearless a man? Tito was afraid to have him shot, so he arranged a "trial" as a result of which the Archbishop was sentenced to sixteen years of hard labor. It was rigged from the start, to be sure, but what of that? It served its purpose and put the churchman behind bars when he could no longer work to stir the hearts and minds of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes.

Destroying Religion

As usual, the communist conspirators are concentrating their main efforts on the uprooting of Religion in Yugoslavia. The Catholic Church and clergy are constantly being villified in the press and on the air. The objects of this scurrilous campaign are helpless. Of the hundred or so Catholic periodicals which flourished before the war, not one is being published today.

An observer in the Balkans, reporting in the magazine *Plain Talk* (December 1946) says that atheism and irreligion are being taught in the schools. "To bring the point home, the pupils are told

to pray to God for candy. Nothing happens. Then they are told to ask Tito for candy. At once a shower of candy falls through the skylight.

“In addition to anti-religious lessons and songs,” the observer continues, “definite efforts are made to break down the moral standards of youth. In the best tradition of Hitler Youth, lascivious stories are told to teen-agers by their teachers. Promiscuity is encouraged. It is hoped that a demoralized youth will spontaneously fall away from Religion.”

Young Catholics, styled “reactionaries” and clerico-Fascists,” have been barred from higher education.

To keep the people from Mass on Sundays, children and older people are obliged to do “public work” or to attend “spontaneous” demonstrations. The work-week is now a seven-day affair. Worshippers are occasionally attacked and beaten by mobs incited by the communist secret police. These same agents have so twisted innocent sermons into “political utterances” that the clergy have been instructed by their superiors instead of preaching to read to the people from pious books.

Use of Lies and Murder

Hundreds of churches have been closed — many of them turned to secular use. The wayside shrines for which the country was famous, have been almost totally destroyed. In Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, the communists entered the Cathedral and smashed the statue of Our Lady of Bistrica. Then, cynically, the Government charged the clergy with this crime and threatened to punish them for “an act against Religion.” Land mines were buried near a shrine in Slovenia, so that a child who went near to pray was blown to bits.

Catholics are denied the right of association. Their societies have been dissolved to the extent that even choir-practices have been forbidden.

Soldiers are forbidden to enter a church or to summon a priest when sick or dying. They are even denied Christian burial.

All Catholic schools, elementary and secondary, have been closed and the buildings confiscated.

All institutions of charity have been shut down with the exception of a few of the larger Catholic hospitals.

Catholic orphanages and homes for

the aged have been closed and the Sisters turned out on the streets.

Convents and religious houses are being dissolved, the properties appropriated. The nuns are directed to get out and get married.

Communist organizations are occupying hundreds of parish and diocesan buildings.

Endowments built up over centuries for education and charity, the gifts of generations of generous people, are being used for the consolidation of the communist state and the maintenance of the huge communist army.

In many sections, newly appointed parish priests have not been allowed to take possession of their parishes unless they have first been approved by the local commissars.

Parish priests in other places have been turned out of their rectories and forced to find a roof wherever they could. In scores of villages, priests have been forbidden from entering their churches under penalty of death.

Religious books and objects of devotion have been burned in churches. The churches themselves have been saved from conflagration only by the heroic efforts of the faithful.

Not even the dead are safe against Tito's minions. The graves of "enemies of the people" have been leveled and crosses over them destroyed. This is how the bodies of our five American airmen came to be thrown into a rubbish heap in a nearby cemetery.

A Reign of Terror

Terror pervades the entire country. Catholic men and women disappear in the dead of the night and their families cannot find out where they have been taken. Most of them never return; the others come back, broken and silent. But if they talk of their experiences, they disappear again — this time for good.

Leading laymen in the church are not spared. In the concentration camp at Lepoglava there are 2,100 intellectuals who at one time played a prominent part in Church affairs.

A separate camp for the Religious is maintained at Stara Gradiska. An eye-witness report from this latter camp states: "When the story of Stara Gradiska is told, the world will blanch with horror, and the camp will take rank with Belsen and Dachau in the history of human degradation."

The walls of houses all over the country are covered with the slogan painted by the communists: "Death to the priests! Death to the signers of the Pastoral Letter!"

"It would be a pleasure for me to kill you," communists have told many a priest, "but the Party thinks the time has not yet come."

Everyone of the Yugoslav Archbishops and Bishops has been arrested and held in prison by the secret police, some for only a few hours, some for several days, some for weeks. All of them are under surveillance, practically under house arrest.

The following statistics have recently become available:

Catholic priests in Yugoslavia in 1939	1,916
Catholic priests in Yugoslavia in 1946	401
Catholic priests killed	369
Catholic priests imprisoned	175
Catholic priests in exile	409
Catholic priests missing	562
Catholic sisters killed	12
Catholic sisters imprisoned	50
Catholic laity killed, estimated (in Croatia alone) at.....	400,000
Catholic laity imprisoned, estimated at over	100,000

Report from Amsterdam

According to a report recently received from Amsterdam at the National Catholic Welfare Conference in Washington, communists in Yugoslavia are currently concentrating their anti-religious persecution on priests and laymen, hoping, apparently, to cripple the Catholic Church without arousing unfavorable comment and publicity abroad.

According to this statement, "Communist 'activitists' are warning Catholics that they must not visit their priests or allow clergymen to visit them in their homes. People who speak to priests in passing on the streets are questioned and threatened by the agents of the secret police . . . The government is also levying impossible taxes against church institutions as a way of forcing them out of existence."

This reporter says that during a recent two-month period, nine priests of the Zagreb Archdiocese have been arrested and a number of others have been forced to leave their parishes under threat of death. Father Anthony Strasek, a priest of the Archdiocese, was killed at Carlovic by communist soldiers because he submitted evidence

of the illegal exaction of wheat from farmers by these same soldiers.

The largely Catholic district around Siroki Brieg in Herzegovina, it is reported, has been subjected to a ruthless transfer of population; the Catholics have been forced to abandon their homes and move farther from the coast into Eastern Bosnia. In the severe wintry weather of the mountains, mothers were compelled to carry their babies in their arms as they walked through sleet and snow for many scores of miles to their new location, where they are now housed in rough huts.

Nor are the Protestants being spared: At Petrovgrad in the Banato district, a Baptist church was burned by communist soldiers.

The Stepinac Case

Archbishop Stepinac, spiritual chief of all Yugoslav Catholics, was arrested on September 18, 1946. From that time until the day of his conviction, October 11, he was allowed to see his counsel only once, and then for just one hour!

Tito alleged six charges against Archbishop Stepinac, trying to make him out as a quisling. But the indictment

was false on every count, as can clearly be shown from the record. Even the Nazis reported, in the *Voelkischer Beobachter* of Nov. 3, 1943, that Archbishop Stepinac had "protested against mass reprisals" and, in general, "attacked the present regime." But Tito was not interested in arriving at the truth. His principal concern was to get the fearless churchman behind bars — by hook or by crook.

The "trial" took place in a school gymnasium. The audience, admitted by ticket, was hand-picked by the communists.

The State "proved" its case, of course. It had been framed before it started. On October 11, 1946, the Archbishop was sentenced to sixteen years of forced labor.

An immediate outcry was raised all over the world. Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson told a press-conference that the conduct of the trial left a great deal to be desired — a profound understatement, to be sure! Winston Churchill, speaking before the House of Commons, said that "the circumstances of the trial and condemnation

of Archbishop Stepinac have created widespread regret . . .”

A Non-Catholic Bishop Says

According to the non-Catholic Bishop Dionisije Milivojevitch, Head of the Serb Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada, “This trial was prepared in the political sphere. It was for the purpose of dividing the Catholic Church in Croatia from its leadership at the Vatican. Tito has openly expressed this purpose. The strategy, which comes definitely from the Kremlin in Russia, is to break the leadership of Religion. It should be noted that opposition to atheism is stronger when there is outside leadership. I refer to the Pope.

“The trial was not based on justice, but was an outrage on justice. Tito’s regime has no interest in justice. It seeks only to stifle opposition.

“I see only martyrdom for Archbishop Stepinac, an innocent man, beloved in Yugoslavia. I am an Orthodox Serb, but I think the accusation and sentencing of Archbishop Stepinac is very unjust, as was the trial and execution of General Mihailovitch, and I sin-

cerely hope that proper steps will be taken to liberate Archbishop Stepinac.”

“This great churchman has been charged with being a collaborator with the Nazis. We Jews deny that!” said Louis S. Breier, Programme Director, American Jewish Committee.

“We, the Methodist Ministers’ meeting of Philadelphia and vicinity, join our Catholic brethren in protest over the persecution and imprisonment of Archbishop Stepinac by communist elements” — so begins a unanimous resolution of nearly a hundred Methodist ministers.

The cause of Archbishop Stepinac must not be forgotten. Tito must not be allowed to have his way — and our Government can very neatly, very easily, force his hand.

What You Can Do

There are two resolutions now before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs which would require our government to take formal action. One is the Rooney Resolution (House Concurrent Resolution No. 4) which calls upon the president to demand the immediate release

of Archbishop Stepinac and all others imprisoned in defense of their faith.

The other is the Ross-Potts Resolution (House Concurrent Resolution No. 32) which demands that the Stepinac case be submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

You could help this great humanitarian by writing in favor of these resolutions to Rep. Charles A. Eaton, chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Washington, D. C.

Copies of your letter should be sent, as well, to Rep. John J. Rooney, the author of the Rooney Resolution; Rep. Robert Tripp Ross, a co-author of the Ross-Potts Resolution; and Mr. Sava N. Kosanovitch, Yugoslav Ambassador, Washington, D. C.

The United States is a democracy, after all, in which your voice and mine count for something — and remember, it's the wheel that squeaks that gets the grease!


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