Philadelphia Protest Draws 40,000 Crowd

Philadelphia — (NC) — A demand for the immediate release of Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac, imprisoned Zagreb Ordinary, and for the cessation of persecutions of Catholics in Tito-terrorized Yugoslavia, was made in a resolution adopted at a protest meeting, which attracted some 40,000 persons who overflowed Philadelphia's huge Municipal Convention Hall.

Sponsored by the Philadelphia County Chapter of the Catholic War Veterans, the meeting was presided over by His Eminence Dennis Cardinal Dougherty, Archbishop of Philadelphia. The huge assemblage was one of more than 1,000 protest meetings planned on a nation-wide basis by Catholic Veterans' and other organizations. The keynote address of the meeting was delivered by Judge Clare Gerald Fenerty of the Court of Common Pleas. The resolution was presented to the gathering—largest ever to assemble in the Convention Hall—by Judge Vincent A. Carroll, also of the Court of Common Pleas.

Others who addressed the meeting included Philadelphia's Mayor Bernard Samuel and Max H. Sorensen, national commander of the Catholic War Veterans. Bishop Hugh L. Lamb, Auxiliary of Philadelphia, and Bishop Emelio Brigard, Auxiliary of Bogota, Colombia, were among the dignitaries in attendance.

Sympathy To Pope

The resolution extended the "heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers" to His Holiness Pope Pius XII, Archbishop Stepinac and the Catholics of Yugoslavia," and also demanded that "our protest be brought to the attention of our Federal Government together with the request that the President and State Department insist on the immediate release of Archbishop Stepinac from prison and the cessation of the persecution of Catholics in Yugoslavia."

Two large parades preceded the meeting and converged upon the auditorium which was filled to capacity an hour before the meeting started. A public address system carried the speeches to some 15,000 persons in other parts of the building and to upwards of 10,000 persons outside, who were unable to gain admission. A special detail of 100 policemen were on hand to control traffic and the city's public transportation system was taxed to capacity in routing the thousands to and from the meeting.

Judge Fenerty asserted that religious and other persecutions had arisen in Yugoslavia partially because Allied leadership had faltered by adopting a policy of appeasement to Moscow. He warned that this nation's officials should "speak out unafraid against communist Russia's zeal for world domination." He urged all Americans to rededicate themselves to the ideals of freedoms of religion and of speech, and respect for human dignity.

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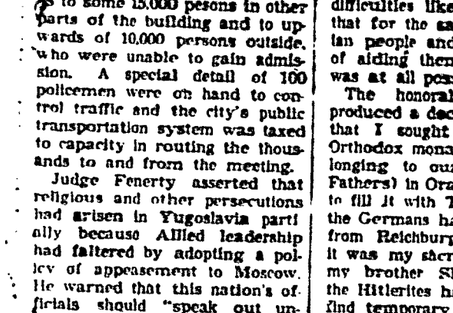

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Full Text of Archbishop Stepinac's Defense

'I Seek No Mercy--My Conscience is Clear--I Am Ready to Die'

Chicago — (NC) — Following is the complete text of the final address to the "People's Court," in Zagreb, Croatia, made by Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac of Zagreb before he was sentenced to 16 years imprisonment at hard labor.

The translation from the Croatian language was made by the Fathers of the Croatian Franciscan Commissariat of the Holy Family here. The Fathers received the text from an absolutely reliable source in Zagreb. The text:

"To all charges brought forth against me here, I answer that my conscience in every way is clear (even though the 'public' ridicule this)., and I do not seek to defend myself against, nor appeal against the verdict.

For my convictions I am able to bear not only ridicule, hatred and humiliations, but —because my conscience is clear—I am ready at any moment to die.

Hundreds of times here I have been called "the accused Stepinac." There is no one so naive as not to know that with "the accused Stepinac" here on the defendant's bench sits the Archbishop of Zagreb, the Metropolitan of Zagreb and the head of the Catholic Church of Yugoslavia.

You yourselves have many times appealed to the accused priests here present to acknowledge that only Stepinac is guilty for their's, the people's and the clergy's stand. The ordinary Stepinac cannot have such influence, only Archbishop Stepinac.

For 17 months there has been waged a campaign against me, publicly and in the press; furthermore, for twelve months I have borne actual internment in the Archbishop's palace.

The guilt of the re-baptism of Serbs is ascribed to me. That is incorrect terminology, for he who is once baptized, need not be re-baptized. The question concerns change of religions, and of this I shall not speak in detail, except to state that my conscience is clear and that history shall one day render its judgment in this matter.

It is a fact that I had to remove pastors, for they stood in danger of death from the Orthodox. The Serbs wanted to kill these priests because they refused them entrance into the church. It is a fact that during the war the Church had to traverse through difficulties like a snake—and that for the sake of the Serbian people and with the aim of aiding them as far as it was at all possible.

The honorable judge has produced a document showing that I sought an abandoned Orthodox monastery (once belonging to our own Pauline Fathers) in Orahovica in order to fill it with Trappists whom the Germans had driven away from Reichburg. I hold that it was my sacred duty to aid my brother Slovenes, whom the Hitlerites had banished, to find temporary shelter.

Because I was the Military Ordinary, grave criminality is imputed to me. This honorable judge asked me if I did not consider myself a traitor to Yugoslavia because in this matter I sought an understanding with the independent State of Croatia.

I was the Military Ordinary for the former Yugoslavia. I labored during those eight to nine years to bring this matter to a definite and solid solution. This question was finally solved through the Yugoslav Concordat, which was accomplished after great difficulties, solemnly ratified in the parliament, but then left to dissolve in the streets.

When the war between Yugoslavia and Germany neared its end I had to extend spiritual aid to the Catholic soldiers of the former Yugoslav army and of the newly created independent State of Croatia. If, therefore, the state had fallen, but the soldiers still remained, then I had to concern myself with this situation.

I was not "persona grata" to either the Germans or the Ustashi; nor was I an Ustasha, nor did I take their oath as did your clerks here present. The Croatian nation unanimously declared itself for the Croatian State and I would have been a blackguard had I not recognized and acknowledged this desire of the Croatian nation, which in the former Yugoslavia had been enslaved.

I have said and declared that Croatians were not allowed to advance in the army or to enter the diplomatic corps unless they changed their religion or married a non-believer. That is the factual basis and background of my pastorals and sermons.

Whatever I have said of the right of the Croatian nation to its freedom and independence is in complete accord with the basic principles enunciated by the Allies at Yalta and in the Atlantic Charter.

If, according to these principles, every nation has the right to independence, then why should it be denied to the Croatian nation? The Holy See has declared that both small nations and national minorities have a right to freedom. Must, then, a Catholic Bishop and Metropolitan not be allowed to even whisper of this? If fall we must, then we fall because we have done our duty.

Do not think that the Croatian nation is pleased with this trial, or that if you give them an opportunity to express themselves I, as a result, shall suffer. I have honored and respected the will of my people, and I shall continue to do so.

You accuse me as an enemy of the State and the people's authority. I today acknowledge your authority. Who was my authority? I must repeat again: you were my authority from May 8, 1945, and not before that. Where is it possible in the world to obey two authorities: you in the woods, or they in Zagreb?

Should I have submitted to the authority of the illegal Simovic, or—as you say—"exiled"—government in London, or of that in Cairo, or yours in the woods, or theirs in Zagreb? Is it at all possible to serve two masters? That cannot be, according to Catholic morals, the laws of nations and common sense. We could not ignore the authority here, even if it were Ustasha. It was here. You have a right to call me to account only from May 8, 1945.

As to my so-called acts of terrorism, you have no proof, nor will anyone believe you. If Lisak, Lela Solijanec and others came to me under assumed names, and if I received a letter which I never read, then if it be a crime because men came to me, I shall accept the verdict with equanimity.

It does not trouble my conscience for issuing a certificate of free movement to the Rev. Maric, for I did not do so with the purpose of creating disorder, and for such guilt I would go to the other world with my soul at peace.

Whether you believe me or not, matters not. The accused Archbishop of Zagreb knows not only how to suffer but also to die for his convictions.

President Bakaric (of Croatia) himself acknowledged to the Rev. Milanovic: "We are convinced that the Archbishop stands behind these acts, but we have no proof." That, for me, is sufficient acknowledgement.

And now, what is the core of the controversy and our vicissitudes, and why has not a peaceful solution been reached? The state prosecutor has many times affirmed that nowhere else is there such freedom of conscience as in this state. I am free to bring out some facts showing the contrary.

Before all, I again affirm: 260 to 270 priests have been killed by the National Liberation Movement. In not one civilized state in the world would so many priests be thus punished for such crimes, as have been imputed to them. Thus, for example, the pastor of Slatina, the Rev. Burger, as a member of the Kulpur band, should have been sentenced, say, to eight years imprisonment; but no, you killed him because he, in fulfillment of his sacred duty as dean, had saved the sacred vessels of a national shrine.

The Rev. Povoljnjak was, without benefit of trial, murdered like a dog in the streets. And the same has been the fate of accused Sisters. In no other civilized state would death have been meted out; only, at the very most, a prison sentence.

You have made a fatal mistake in murdering priests! The people shall not forgive you for that. Such is your "freedom."

Our Catholic schools, built at the cost of great sacrifices, have been taken away from us. If I had not received seven carloads of foodstuffs from America, we could not have done anything, and that for the children of our poor peasant folk.

With force you took away all the seminary property. You have done nothing less than what the Gestapo did in seizing the seminary at Mokrica. We are not against agarian reforms—the Holy See has issued many encyclicals on social reforms—but they should have been carried out in agreement with the Holy See.

Our orphanages have been made useless. Destroyed are our printing establishments, and I do not know if one still exists. We have no more our publications, which have so often here been attacked.

Is it not manifestly scandalous to uphold that nowhere does the Church enjoy "freedom" as here?

The Dominicans gave a spiritual book, which was translated by me from the French, to be printed at a cost of 75,000 Dinars. But they never received these books. How much damage was sustained! Is that freedom of the Press?

The St. Jerome Society has ceased to exist. It is a grave offense against the people thus to treat their greatest and oldest cultural institution. You have reproached me for the work of my "Caritas." But I say to you here: "Caritas" has performed untold services for our people and your children.

Then there is the question of religious instruction in the schools. You have laid down the rule: in the higher grades of the secondary schools religious instruction is forbidden, and in the lower grades it is according to choice.

How can you give to children the right to determine for themselves when they have not grown up, while those in the higher grades who have the right to vote are not allowed freedom of choice in this regard.

Our nursing Sisters in the Catholic hospitals must bear untold miseries and hardships.

Against the overwhelming opposition of the people you have introduced civil marriages. Why did you not interpret this freedom in accordance with the mentality of our people in America — where rules a wise republic—where one is free to choose either civil or religious marriage?

We do not deny to you some control over marriage. But it grievously pains our people when they must first of all enter a civil before a religious marriage. If you had turned to us, we would have given you suggestions on this matter.

Buildings of some of the Religious In Backa have been confiscated. Some churches in Split (I do not know whether it is still the case), have been converted into warehouses. Church lands have been seized without any agreement with the Holy See. You have seen that the people, because of your agrarian reforms, refuse to take that land.

No, the material question is the least of our problems. The sad thing is this: not one priest or Bishop is today certain of his life day or night. Bishop Srebrnic was attacked in Susak by youngsters at the instigation of influential persons. For three hours they tormented him and even penetrated his room while your police and militia merely looked on.

And I myself experienced the same in Zapresica when I was attacked with rocks and revolvers. Bishop Lach, when he was on a Confirmation assignment across the Drave, and even though they knew his purpose, was sent back and held the whole night in the prison at Koprivnica. In fact, your own men who were in the woods came to me and declared. "This is unbecoming conduct. We shall protest to the authorities."

Rocks were hurled through the window of the house where Bishop Buric was staying while on a Confirmation tour. Bishop Pusic, as I heard, was recently the object of rotten apples, eggs, etc.

Such "freedom" we hold to be an illusion. And we do not want to exist like outlawed slaves. We shall fight, with all just means, for our rights—and right here in this state.

Here are—so that you may understand why we fight—some three or four more examples of your "freedom." In the classrooms it is officially affirmed—in defiance of all historical proofs — that Jesus Christ never existed. Know you then: Jesus Christ is God. For Him we are ready to die. And today, it is your teaching that He never actually lived. If a teacher dared to teach the contrary, it would be certain that he would be cast out.

I tell you, Mr. Prosecutor, that under such conditions the Church is not free, but will be annihilated in a short time.

Christ is the foundation of Christianity. You have concern for the Orthodox Serbs. I ask you: how can you conceive of Orthodoxy without Christ? How can you conceive of the Catholic Church without Christ? That is an utter absurdity.

In the school books it is stated that the Mother of God is an adulteress. Don't you know that both for Catholics and Orthodox the Mother of God is the holiest of thoughts and affections?

You have ordained, as the official decrees, that men are interned from the ages. Perhaps many have died there. But why order that as an official thing which today is a shame of world renown here in HE.

According to your understanding, matrimony is the only worthwhile system. And that means recovery of God and Christianity. If there is nothing but matter—then thank you for your "freedom."

One of your men of higher influence once boasted: there is no one in this State whom we could not bring to court and sentence.

To these outrageous charges whereby you place us among murderers and friends of terrorists, I say to you that not all the evil deeds in the former independent State of Croatia were perpetrated by the Democrats and the Ustashi.

It was not easy for the Church, and many difficulties had to be overcome.

Let no one think I want war. Let the present authorities come to an understanding with the Holy See. The Church does not recognize division into classes, but she is not against legitimate differences. If these could be settled, then also dialogue will come with their duly and there will be no need to seek our rights in prison cells (like Stalin's) guilt, as was done here.

Finally, I want to say a few words to the Communist party, which, in reality, is my accuser. If you think I have taken the person named in cause of material things, you are wrong. For we have reclaimed from other persons what have made my own.

We are not against workers realizing greater rights in the factories, for this is in the spirit of the Papal Encyclicals. Nor are we against reforms.

But let the leaders of communism allow us to say: if there shall be freedom of spread materialism, then let us have the right to confess and propagate our principles. Catholics have died and will die for that right.

I conclude: With good will an understanding can come about. The initiative lies with the present authorities. Neither

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