Hard Hit by Nazism and War, Church In Austria Seen Making Comeback

(Dr. Frederic Funder, one of Europe's foremost journalists and long-time Vienna correspondent of the N.C.W.C. News Service, is back. A dominant figure in the fore-ranks of Catholic writers, Dr. Funder, now in his mid-70's, was a vigorous foe of Nazism. After the Hitler-engineered "anschluss" in Austria, he was arrested and shunted from one concentration camp to another — including the dreaded Dachau camp. The following evaluation of the Church's position in central and eastern Europe, marks the first article he has contributed to N.C.W.C. News Service since the Austrian occupation.)

By DR. FREDERIC FUNDER
(Special Correspondent, N.C.W.C. News Service)

Vienna—Will the Catholic Church in central and eastern Europe recover from the severe trials undergone during the past eight years, or is its position to grow worse? This anxious query occupies the mind of every attentive observer of European developments. Without a doubt, the countries extending from the Danube to the Vistula are on the eve of decisions which will determine their spiritual destiny for centuries to come.

The actual situation is characterized by three main features. 1. The losses incurred by the Church during the reign of Nazidom; 2. The advance and progress of Communism even towards Western Europe; and 3. The new supremacy acquired by Russian Orthodoxy among the Western Slavs, now united to Soviet Russia.

The body of the Catholic Church in Central Europe is bleeding from many wounds. The loss of blood is considerable, primarily in Yugoslavia, where in the course of the inner conflicts and the fighting, continuing unto this day, hundreds of priests have been killed, and in some districts all Catholic ministry has been put to an end.

Hit Hard In Hungary

In Hungary the Church has been hit hard by the radical agricultural reforms, which have deprived it of vast stretches of land bequeathed to it, ever since the Middle Ages, by royal grants and donations. It has lost all those sources of revenue which had up to now enabled the building of churches, the upkeep of Catholic schools, hospitals and scientific institutions.

The Church in Czechoslovakia is faced with even greater difficulties. The border provinces have, through the expulsion and deportation of their German populations totalling 3,000,000 persons, lost their pastoral organization.

In Austria, where the Church was not endowed with landed property extensively, as was the case in Hungary, but where the State, according to a legally established order, contributed to the maintenance of the pastors, the transition to the present situation has been more gradual. Within the Central European area the Catholic Church in Austria represents an element of order and promising vitality, though still suffering under the losses inflicted by the Nazi regime.

Chief Hitler Target

No other institution in Austria was attacked so aggresively by Hitler as the Catholic Church. It was here that Nazidom recognized its most formidable foe. So it left nothing undone in its attempt to uproot the Church economically, to discredit the clergy, to silence the Church by a system of terrorism, and to bring about the apostasy of the faithful.

This first attack of Nazidom proved to be a failure. The second, the attempt at the intimidation of the clergy, failed too. In Austria, 781 priests were sent to prison — 176 in Styria alone; 97 were confined to concentration camps, where 22 of them died wretchedly; 13 were condemned to death or murdered in prison by the Gestapo. But as the reign of terror increased, the splendid heroism of modest vicars-priests, curates and monks grew in the same measure. It was all of no use to the aggressors, even though they dragged priests into prisons at the slightest provocation.

One of my Dachau fellow prisoners who died in captivity, was the Tyrolian parish priest, Father Neururer, from the neighborhood of Innsbruck. He had been arrested for having refused the Church's blessing in a case of open bigamy. He was treated with particular severity, with reduced food rations, until he died of exhaustion.

Indifferent Catholics Fell

The Nazi offensive against the mass of indifferent Catholics was far more dangerous and more effective. During the first year after the occupation of Austria, the number of apostasies grew to unheard of dimensions. All who were not religiously steadfast and were swept along in the Nazi tide, broke down completely. In the first year of Nazi occupation, the Catholic Church in Austria lost roughly speaking 80,000 of its 6,000,000 adherents. This desertion of the Church increased in 1939, when the Church lost another 11,000.

The worst conditions as a result of this propaganda for apostacy, were to be found in the Styrian diocese, which in 1938 lost 17,470 of its 960,000 Catholics, and 27,654 more in 1939. From 1938 to 1945, this diocese counted a total of 86,375 apostasies, almost one tenth of the officially-registered Catholics.

Altogether the Church in Austria lost approximately 240,000 Catholics during the occupation by Hitler. Some of these apostates were weaklings who became a prey to terrorism. The majority, however, were educated people, who already were estranged from the Church, and had only remained registered as Catholics.

Of those who abandoned the Church, about one quarter have returned. In Styria before the end of 1945, of the 86,375 apostates, 20,439 had been readmitted. The number of readmissions increases still, from month to month.

Vocations Drop

As soon as the war was over, the Austrian Bishops issued severe instructions for the treatment of the apostates who crowded the parish offices, demanding readmission. They had to be shown that religion could not be changed like a shirt, and that a condition for the return to the Church was an earnest intention. Those seeking readmission have to follow a course of instruction lasting several months, during which their pastor has to ascertain their serious intentions.

Of portentous consequence are the losses suffered by the diocesan and religious clergy through the fact they have not been able to admit young students and novices during the war years. In 1946 there were only 443 students in theology in the seminaries and religious institutions of all the Austrian dioceses, as compared with 739 in 1938. Only the dioceses of Upper Austria, Salzburg and Tyrol formed an exception and have a satisfactory number of recruits for the priesthood. In the Archdiocese of Vienna, which suffered from a lack of priests before the war, the number of students in theology has dropped down to a quarter of that of normal times.

Nuns, especially, deplore the sharp decline in religious vocations among young women. The Ursuline nuns, especially, are lacking replacements for their educational establishments, and the Sisters of Charity for their hospitals.

Let DPs In Vets Urge

Milwaukee — (NC)—A resolution has been adopted by the Milwaukee County Chapter of the Catholic War Veterans urging the lowering of immigration restrictions to permit the entrance into the United States of 300,000 displaced persons of Europe.

Good Friday Bill in House

Washington — (RNS) — A bill proposing that Good Friday have the same legal status as other holidays observed in the United States has been introduced into the house of Representatives by Rep. Lansdale G. Sasscer of Maryland.

Rep. Sasscer declared in introducing the measure that although 13 states and 73 cities have proclaimed Good Friday a legal holiday, the United States is one of the few major predominantly Christian countries which has not given official recognition to "this important commemorative date on the Christian calendar."

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The NATIONAL East Main at Stone

Boys' Shop Third Floor

AS 400 COUPLES RENEWED THEIR MARITAL VOWS

In St. Andrew's Catholic Church, Chicago, a boy and girl from the parish grade school, in wedding dress, and their six attendants pray in the sanctuary [illegible] marriage vows at a low Mass and received Holy Communion. [illegible] O. S. B., read the pledge to Christian Marriage, taken by all present. [illegible] feature of the opening session of the 15th annual convention of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life, meeting in Chicago, March 10-12. AP Wirephoto.

Halt Anti-Family Tide In U. S. Conference Urged

(Continued from Page 1)

mestic difficulties. In fact, there is a drift toward considering marriage a mere private institution and not an important social function. This is a tragic, dangerous materialistic concept and not a Christian doctrine."

Speakers Listed

Among prominent speakers at the Family Life sessions, besides Cardinal Stritch and Bishop Bartholome, were Bishops John F. Noll of Fort Wayne and Francis J. Haas of Grand Rapids; the Rev. Dr. Edgar Schmiedeler, O.S.B., director of the N. C. W. C. Family Life Bureau, which sponsored the convention; Msgr. Edward Swanstrom, assistant executive director of War Relief Services—N. C. W. C.; the Very Rev. Francis J. Connell, C.SS.R., of the Catholic University of America; the Rev. Daniel Cantwell, of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, Mundelein, Ill.; Miss Mary Callahan, president of the Family Life Conference; Inspector John J. McGuire of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Harry B. Reid of the CIO.

Bishop Noll spoke on the influence of indecent literature on the family. Pointing to a "steady decline in the spiritual health of most families," the Bishop declared that it was largely due to the "universal educators, such as the radio, the weekly and monthly magazine, the daily newspaper, the motion picture." While stating that "the magazine is far less putrid than it was a few years ago," because of the efforts of the National Organization for Decent Literature founded in 1938, he added that the moral caliber of the book "is becoming worse from year to year."

He continued: "Most 'best sellers' offend most against morals, and they become 'best sellers' not on their merits, but through the new method of distribution." This, he said, consists in the fact that millions of people in this country have joined clubs and committed themselves to buy at least four or five books each year chosen by those clubs.

Convention Theme

Dr. Schmiedeler's address dwelt on the theme of the convention, "The Church, the Support of the Family." Family life, to be successful, needs the Church, he declared, because this religious body "consistently upholds the essential ground work of marriage. Down through history, in the face of any and all pressures to the contrary, she has unreservedly taught, and unfalteringly upheld the three great foundation stones of wedlock, its unity, its sanctity, its indissolubility."

Monsignor Swanstrom's address highlighted the disruption of family life in Europe. He related how Hitler had torn husbands, wives and children apart, first in the "terrible holocaust visited upon the Jewish populations" and then by his policy of forced labor instituted in the conquered [illegible] "It is a terrible and frightening commentary on our post-war world that the crime for which we Allies hanged Nazis is now being perpetrated against the vanquished.

"Five million German soldiers whose crime is that they were conscripted into Hitler's armies, are now separated from their families because they are performing slave labor for the allies. These men were captured as prisoners of war. Even as animals, these men have the rights of human beings, of men, of children of God. Of these rights they have been deprived by nations which fought a war for the rights of human beings. Many of the men now performing slave labor in French mines, in Russian towns, factories, mines and roads, are the fathers of large families. A great deal of the misery that is found in Germany today is due to the fact that the breadwinners of families, the fathers of little children, the sons of aged parents, the elder brothers of orphans are separated from those whom they should be caring for and protecting."

Appeasing Reds M[illegible] War, N.D. Expert W[illegible]

[illegible]

Notre Dame, Ind.—[illegible] the Moscow Conference will [illegible] likely to war," Dr. Waldemar Gurian, [illegible] Science at the University of Notre Dame and an outstanding authority on Russia, warned [illegible] in an address at the Knights of Columbus Forum.

Dr. Gurian emphasized that the [illegible]

Soviet mentality, based as it is on suspicion and distrust of other nations, is such that even revealing American atomic bomb secrets to Russia would in no way help to win Russia's good will," he asserted. Such a gesture of goodwill, he said, would be regarded by the Soviet Government [illegible] of the United States.

Dr. Gurian continued:

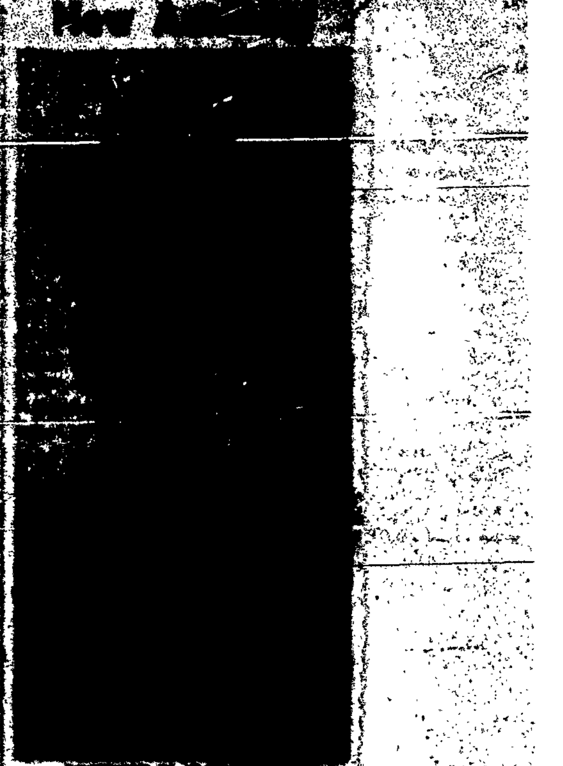
"The United States today is obliged to help maintain a world order that [illegible] of Communist influence. But our defensive against Communism must be supported by [illegible] that Soviet [illegible] This offensive will not be satisfied with negative action, such as espionage [illegible] friends and encirclements. Anti-Communist measures must be based on a positive policy, and the backbone of that policy is social justice for all men.

"It is meaningless to defend situations which, based upon social injustices and rule by incompetent groups, are destined to fall. Obviously, in the interest of world peace, it is necessary to prevent Russia from becoming the heir to the British Empire. But this does not mean that the United States must take over all British policies and commitments.

Encyclicals Cited

"The Papal Encyclicals, for instance, have emphasized the necessity of social reforms and the introduction of policies based on social justice. Besides measures to prevent the spread of Communist influence, then, it is necessary to advocate and put into practice such policies of social justice."

Dr. Gurian said he doubted that there would be war with Soviet Russia if the Western democracies, particularly the United States, [illegible] against further concessions to the Soviet Government.



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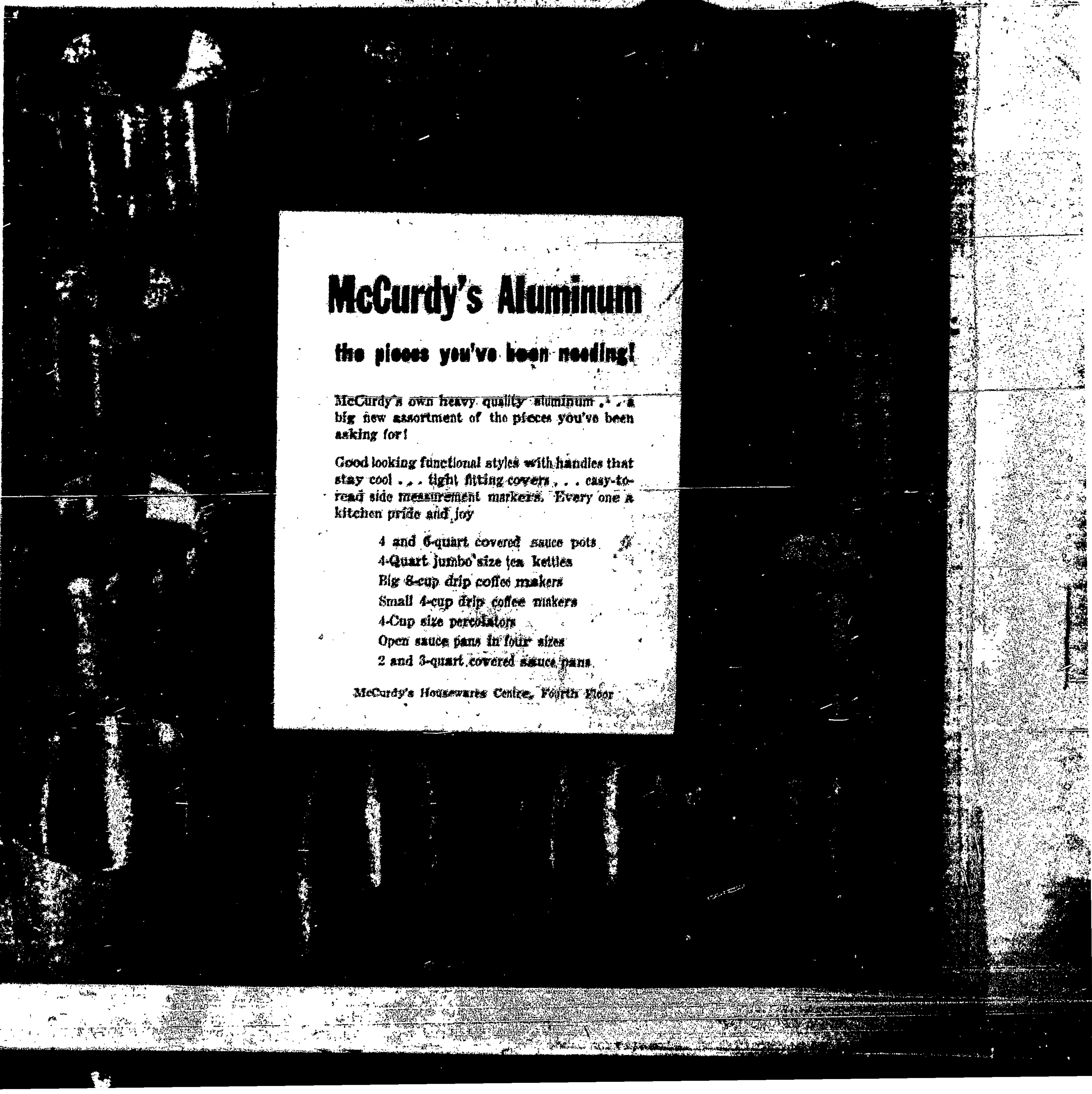
[illegible] Holiness Pope Pius XII [illegible] the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Thomas J. McDonough, Chancellor of the Diocese of St. Augustine [illegible] Titular Bishop of [illegible] Auxiliary Bishop of St. Augustine. [illegible]