

Church Defended Against New Tax

By RUNE P. THURINGER
(NC News Service)

Stockholm — The government's treatment of a Catholic parish has aroused a hue and cry in the parliament and public press of this historically Protestant country.

The finance ministry has refused to exempt St. Eugenia's Catholic parish here from the "investment tax," even though the parish needs to replace a church condemned in an urban renewal program. A Protestant member of parliament, Mr. Rimmerfors of the Liberal party, and Mr. Fridolfsson of the Conservative party, have charged that religious freedom in Sweden is threatened by the government's attitude.

The objections of the legislators followed a protest by five influential Protestant laymen against the demand that St. Eugenia parish build a new church by 1970 or pay a fine to the city, in addition to the 25% investment tax.

The Protestant laymen criticized the government's handling of the matter as showing a "lack of generosity and an indifference toward a minority group and its reasonable need, a circumstance little worthy of a cultural country."

In an urban renewal project, the city of Stockholm acquired the property of 130-year-old St. Eugenia's church. The city was to provide another site, and the new church was to be completed before April 1, 1970, or the parish would be required to pay a fine. A new site was agreed upon, but the government, in an anti-inflationary move, introduced the investment tax on the construction of certain new buildings, such as churches. The St. Eugenia congregation applied for an exemption and was refused.

The Protestant Council for Planning of Church Buildings supported the protesting laymen, as did leading Swedish newspapers.

Rimmerfors and Fridolfsson said that "in an era of ecumenism" the government's action had caused an adverse reaction abroad, making Sweden seem hostile toward Catholics, many of them "immigrants in great need of contact with their own church."

Fridolfsson, in questioning Finance Minister Gunnar Strang, asked:

"Do you believe it corresponds to the idea of religious freedom to prevent a denomination from purchasing needed localities, especially when it is doing so through its own economic efforts?"

Strang defended the govern-

ment's position in what one newspaper termed a "cynical" manner. He made the following points:

—The city of Stockholm probably not fine St. Eugenia's congregation if the church is not completed in 1970.

—It is not possible to make exemptions at this time in the case of "heavy investments." (Two projects, however, have been exempted from the tax — the Film Institute and the administration building of the Swedish Association of Technologists.)

—Catholics had to accept the city's offer of the ABC Theater for temporary use. It seats 300 and the congregation will have to doubt its services to accommodate the parishioners.

The city also proposed an old public bath opposite the theater to serve as a rectory, office and parish hall.

The St. Eugenia controversy has become a matter of widespread discussion, with public opinion very much on the side of the Catholic parish. The Swedish Council of Churches, in which Catholics have a delegate, observer, sent a letter to the government demanding that it try to solve the St. Eugenia problem in a positive and reasonable way.

The liberal evening paper Expressen said editorially, following the debate in parliament between the finance minister and the questioning lawmakers:

"Break down the liturgical life of 2,600 Catholics in Stockholm. Let them gather together 300 at a time in an outdated theater. Spread out the parish areas in a handful of houses in the neighboring blocks to be pulled down. House the clergy in the central bath, separated from the splashing of the ladies' bath only by an open passage. This was Finance Minister Strang's recommendation yesterday in the second chamber he tried to explain why the St. Eugenia parish has not been allowed to build a new church, when their old one was pulled down."

The liberal daily Dagens Nyheter said that "the cynicism of Mr. Strang must have been a real shock to the parishioners." Father Peter Hornung, S.J., rector of St. Eugenia's, was present during the parliament debate.

"The delay of the building work," the paper added, "ought to bring an investigation if St. Clara's (Lutheran) church or any other Lutheran city church could not be offered for the use of the Catholics. Is there no person to be found in the State Church who will take the initiative?"

Brazilian Bishops Speak Out For Social Reform

Rio de Janeiro — Brazil's beleaguered Catholic Church has declared itself free to guide Catholic social teaching and practice, under the supervision of the Pope alone.

Into an atmosphere of social unrest, the central commission of the hierarchy has released a statement of its solidarity with priests and bishops who have run afoul of the government.

Church and state must have "autonomy and independence with mutual respect," the statement declares. And the church "will not oppose any order of civil society which is just and reasonable."

Until now, the church as a whole has not publicly declared its position in relation to the military government. A few progressive bishops have spoken out and many priests have joined workers and students in protests. There have been several instances of harassment, search and arrest.

The bishops' statement strongly implied that the government has been attempting to interfere in Church administration and accused it, in effect, of accepting "the Marxist concept of religion" by upholding the view "that the religious mission of bishops must not pass the limits of the spiritual life."

The statement was based largely on Pope Paul's encyclical on social justice in developing nations, "Populorum Progressio." Although it was issued in March, government authorities blocked the encyclical's publication in Brazil until May. Some spokesmen criticized it for "Marxist" tendencies because of such passages as a statement on land reform, which said that the right to private property is not absolute.

The encyclical has been quoted frequently by opponents of the government, including members of outlawed organizations. "Meditating sincerely on the needs of our mission," the bishops said, "we feel the weight of our responsibility in the present historical moment of Brazil. We love our country and our people."

Cardinal Riberi Passes at 70

Vatican City—(NC)—Antonio Cardinal Riberi died (Dec. 10) in Rome from complications of bronchial edema.

The 70-year-old cardinal, who was raised to the college of cardinals last June, had been rumored to be slated for a high Vatican post in the forthcoming reorganization of the Roman Curia.

Cardinal Riberi's death, occurring shortly after that of Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, reduced the college of cardinals to 113.

"In particular, we send a word of comfort to our priests, whose anguish and worries are well-known to us. We welcome their thoughts when they are expressed with objectivity and dignity. We know that in many dioceses in the Church there is already a sincere, dynamic force of valid experience in the priesthood. We can do much for a more adequate solution to the problems of our people."

In November, a spokesman for the bishops' conference confirmed that 300 Brazilian priests had sent the bishops a letter appealing for support of radical social and ecclesiastical reforms.

The letter, which said that "Brazil is no longer the Catholic country we are accustomed to believe in," criticized the government for "unjust" social structures and for spending more money on the armed forces than on health, education and other social needs.

It also criticized "paternalistic" structures in the Church, lack of dialogue with the laity and the spending of Church funds on elaborate buildings.

According to Time Magazine, Brazil's President Arthur Costa e Silva "did not quite know what to say."

"A staunch and faithful Catholic, he visited Pope Paul twice in the past three years," Time reported. "To help arrange a truce, Costa asked to meet with the church's leading bishops some time next month."

"He realizes all too well that it was the wrath of the Catholic Church that helped topple Argentine Dictator Juan Peron in 1955."

It called for special dispensation for priests who leave the ministry to marry.

The bishops' statement is being interpreted as partially a response to this letter, as well as a comment on social conditions in Brazil and the need to implement the reforms called for in Populorum Progressio.

On the relation of the Church to the government, the bishops said that they "cannot accept, outside of Church legislation, limitations or definitions set by others."

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Bishops Back Papal Nuncio

Rio de Janeiro — (RNS) — Archbishop Sebastiao Baggio, Papal Nuncio to Brazil, has been defended by the country's Roman Catholic hierarchy following by the influential Jornal do Brasil newspaper reports that the government would ask for his replacement because he is considered "too progressive."

The Journal said that the government of President Arthur Costa e Silva had charged Archbishop Baggio with insufficient cooperation.

A current source of Church-state tension is the effort to deport a French-born Deacon, Guy Michel Thibaut, whom the

government has accused of subversion. Deacon Thibaut, who was arrested for involvement in prohibited student activities and then released is once again being sought by the police.

Bishop Valdir Calheiros de Novais of Barra do Pirai-Volta Redonda, who has visited President Costa e Silva to discuss the case of Deacon Thibaut, said, "personally, I am convinced that Thibaut is innocent."

He indicated that he believes the French cleric was deluded by leftist students.



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