

U.S. Bishops Urge Major Reform of Federal Welfare

Washington — (NC) — The U.S. Catholic Bishops this week called for major reform of the federal welfare system and asked the entire Catholic population to focus local attention on the moral imperative of assisting the poor.

Speaking through an Inter-Religious Committee composed of the Secretaries of the National Council of Churches, the Synagogue Council of America and the U.S. Catholic Conference, the Bishops proclaimed the week of June 1-7 as Welfare Reform Week.

Stating that "reform of the welfare system in America is long overdue," the general secretaries of the groups said the special week was to educate the public as to the need of such reform and to show support for reforms like those proposed by President Nixon in a speech last August.

Legislation incorporating his major suggestions has been passed by the House of Representatives and is now being considered by the U.S. Senate.

Noting that the present Aid for Families with Dependent

Children (AFDC) program "disrupts families, often fails to provide minimal subsistence, demeans the recipient and reaches less than half of those in need," the religious leaders expressed their deep concern with the suffering of the nation's poor.

They praised the President and Congress for their current efforts to give assistance to those unable to provide adequately for themselves and their families.

"Pending legislation in the Senate, or some similar family assistance program, which provides income maintenance and rewards for suitable work, sets important new directions and deserves support, even though the benefit schedule should be substantially increased," they said.

In their call for Welfare Reform Week, the general secretaries asked local priests, ministers and rabbis to hold meetings and education-information programs on the critical national issues of hunger and poverty and reform of the present welfare system in the United States.



Showing Their Support

Hard-hatted construction workers, longshoremen and office workers show their support for U.S. Viet policy in rally near New York City Hall. (RNS)

Md. Governor Vetoes Liberal Abortion Bill

Annapolis, Md. — (NC) — Gov. Marvin Mandel vetoed a bill which virtually would have stripped Maryland of all restrictions on abortions.

Acting after two pressure-packed months during which he conducted a public hearing and received more than 50,000 letters on the issue, the governor said he rejected the measure purely on legal grounds.

The measure would have made abortion a matter between a woman and her physician — no more difficult to obtain than any other medical operation.

Since March 31 when the measure cleared the state legislature, Gov. Mandel repeatedly indicated concern about legal shortcomings in the bill—such as lack of restriction on the number of weeks after conception an abortion might be performed and failure to give the

husband or father a voice in a woman's decision to seek an abortion.

Opposition to the measure was led by Cardinal Lawrence Shehan of Baltimore, Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle of Washington and Bishop Thomas J. Mardaga of Wilmington, Del., whose dioceses include parts of Maryland.

The Catholic leaders were intent upon taking the issue to the people of Maryland in the event the governor approved the bill.

Two days before the governor acted, petitions were circulated at Catholic parishes throughout Maryland, designed to put the issue on the November ballot for referendum. Under Maryland procedure 28,000 signatures by qualified voters could force such an issue to referendum.

N.Y. to Attract Vt. Abortions

Burlington, Vt. — (RNS) — When New York State's abortion law becomes effective July 1, Vermont's Planned Parenthood Association will refer women seeking abortions to its Albany, N.Y., chapter.

An association announcement explained that a "referral" will be no more than a statement that Vermont law prohibits abortion counseling. There will be a central telephone number to reach New York Planned Parenthood for guidance.

By mid-June, the Vermont chapter expects to learn details on how New York's law will be applied to non-residents, according to David Wagner, executive director.

Vermont's abortion law, one of the strictest in the country, provides a prison sentence of three years or more for counseling, procuring or performing an abortion.

Viet Cong Targets: Catholic Priests

Binh Thien, Vietnam—(NC) — "Find the priest and kill him".

Father John Nguyen Thiep, 33, crouched in a bunker and listened to the Viet Cong platoon leader give orders to kill him. But the priest and the 14 orphan boys in the bunker with him survived the 30-minute raid on the village which left two dead and 16 wounded.

Using explosives, rockets and constantly shooting, the Viet Cong raiders destroyed the village Catholic church, the primary school and a training school for girls that Father Thiep had built in the past three years. He estimates it will cost him about \$8,000 to repair the damage.

In February 1969, the Viet

Cong raided Binh Khanh village in the province, ordered Father Alphonse Nguyen Duc Diem, C.S.S.R., out of his house and killed him.

Fathers Diem and Thiep were seminary classmates, and the two villages are eight miles apart.

Father Thiep has been in Binh Thien three years. He has built the parish up to 3,000 Catholics in a population of 8,000.

According to Father Thiep, the pacification program is not very successful in Quang Ngai province. He blames local government officials who do not work hard enough to root out the VC. Often, he said the officials know who the Viet Cong are but do not act against them.

1,200 Churchmen Convene In Peace - Seeking Session

Washington, D.C. — (RNS) — Twelve hundred clergymen and laymen convened here in response to a call for an Emergency Religious Convocation to Help End the War in Southeast Asia.

In an opening session at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church on May 26 they were told by Sen. Harold E. Hughes (D-Iowa) that the meeting was "especially timely and significant because it reasserts the most compelling reason of all for peace and withdrawal — the moral reason."

The anti-war legislator was introduced by Dr. Cynthia Wedel, president of the National Council of Churches. She noted that he is a co-sponsor of the McGovern-Hatfield Senate move calling for the withdrawal of American military forces from Cambodia.

Initiating the convocation were 60 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders. Respondents came from all parts of the nation, including Hawaii. Briefing sessions on the war issue and visits with legislators to ex-

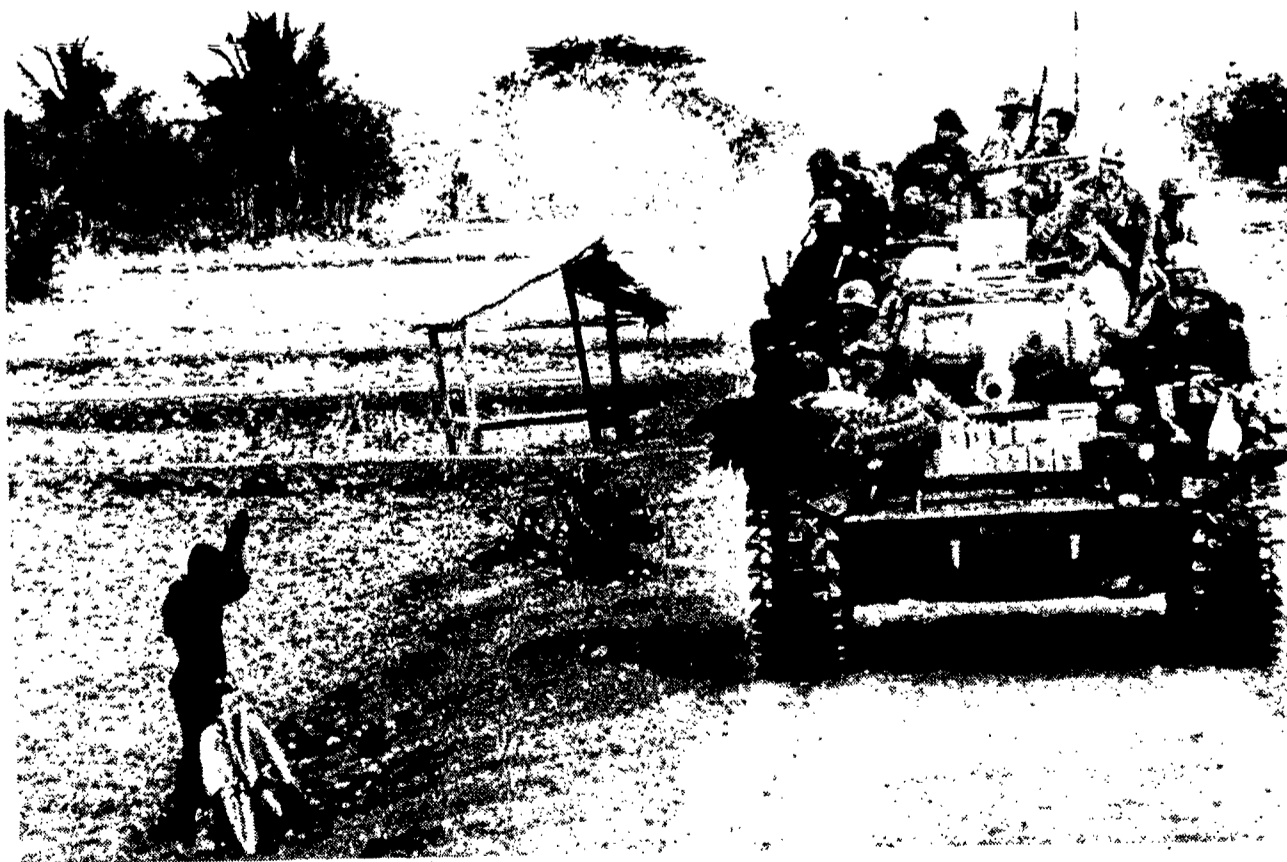
press views were foremost on the agenda.

In the early afternoon following the opening, some 500 of the group stood on the capitol steps in a silent vigil for peace.

Sen. Hughes, a United Methodist lay preacher, said that "the true call of conscience does not come in leisure or in comfort — it comes suddenly and unannounced when human need explodes, when crises are born.

"As I see it, you people are here . . . because you chose to live the religion you profess. I am grateful to be a part of the convocation."

The Iowa senator said that in recent weeks, "a vast multitude of people who were previously quiescent are becoming aware of what this war is doing to our economy, to our domestic order, to our hope for meeting vital national needs in education, in welfare, in medical research, in the preservation of our natural environment — our God-given natural resources."



Cambodian Greeting

A Cambodian peasant stands near his bicycle and raises his hands in greeting as a South Vietnamese tank load with troops rumbles by during an operation to clear Route 1 in the eastern part of Cambodia. (RNS Photo)