

The Religious Policy of the Hungarian Government

In November 1987 the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) conducted a comprehensive review of ideology for the first time in over twenty years. The review was intended to produce clear ideological guidelines for the government's reform of the country's economic and political life. However, what emerged — the 11 November Resolution of the Central Committee — reflected deep divisions with the HSWP, and consisted of little more than bland and in some cases ambiguous statements.

While questions of economic and political reform were uppermost in the minds of Central Committee members, their inability to agree on significant changes in ideological outlook also has a bearing on the party's policy towards religion and the churches. During the past decade the HSWP has earned a reputation for being the least militantly atheistic of all the communist parties within the Soviet bloc. The roots of the HSWP's policy towards religion lie in a Politburo resolution of 22 July 1958, which came as the Kádár regime was completing its consolidation of power following the 1956 uprising. This resolution, which is firmly based on orthodox Marxist-Leninist principles, commits the party to continue both the ideological struggle against religion and strict political supervision of the churches by the state. It does, however, allow for a deviation from what has become customary Marxist-Leninist practice by acknowledging that the aim of the party to create a socialist, and ultimately a communist, society, is best served by practising greater tolerance towards religious belief as long as those beliefs do not give rise

to actions that are seen as obstructing the realisation of that aim. Over the past three decades the HSWP has developed this aspect of its policy to the point where believers and the churches generally have considerable opportunities for public expression of their faith without fear of reprisals. As a result there is increasing discussion in both East and West about how far Hungary might serve as an example for other communist countries in these days of glasnost' and perestroika.

Satisfaction with the HSWP's policy towards religion is not, however, universal within the upper echelons of the HSWP itself. Some senior communists argue that the present level of state restriction on religious activity prevents the unleashing of the latent constructive energies of the churches, especially in the areas of social work, education, and the cultivation of moral values. Among the practical proposals coming from the Marxist critics of current policy are the revision or termination of the restrictive church-state agreements of 1948 and 1950, the drafting of a new, more liberal law on associations, and the reestablishment of church schools. It is not clear whether such thinking has become ascendant within the HSWP, nor is it yet known whether these reformers would be prepared to end the use of state power as a weapon in the party's ideological struggle against religion.

Below we are publishing the text of the two main articles of the Politburo resolution of 22 July 1958. See also an interview with Dr Sándor Boros, Deputy Director of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the HSWP's Central Committee, published on pp. 146-53, which sheds

light on current party attitudes towards religion, and "A New Programme: a New Policy?" on pp. 164-68.

The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Politburo Resolution on the Ideological Struggle against the Religious World View and on the Tasks of Instruction and Education among the Religious Masses (22 July 1958)

The HSWP Politburo declares that in the struggle against the religious world view and in carrying out enlightenment and educational work amongst the religious masses the following factors must be kept in mind:

1. As a result of the building and achievements of socialism, and the changes in our social, political and economic relations, the social roots of the religious world view have been loosened. The rapid progress of the sciences, the achievements of the cultural revolution, Marxist-Leninist education, the propaganda of the social and natural sciences and the work of our party in educating and instructing the masses have all played a major role in the growth of our people's self-awareness. We have taken a considerable step forward in the eradication of ignorance. Consequently the epistemological basis of the religious world view has been weakened.

2. In spite of significant progress religious ideology has deep roots. This is particularly so in the more backward sections of society: the population of the villages, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the more backward sections of the workers, women, the young, and the intelligentsia. The influence of religious ideology is to be found even in individual party members.

Certain social groupings, especially declassed elements of the former ruling classes, take part in religious

ceremonies as a demonstration resulting from reactionary political attitudes.

3. Several factors have hindered the development of the ideological struggle against religious ideology and the work of mass education:

(a) the struggles at the level of world views and educational work have been conducted weakly; the struggle against hostile ideologies has been neglected and undervalued; right-wing opportunism has handled the religious question in a liberal manner, while left-wing sectarian impatience has spread. Together these have created confusion within the party: in general they have confused the struggle against the religious world view with that against the clerical forces of reaction.

(b) Responding to changes in the world the churches are systematically developing their tactics against communism and the workers' movement on an international scale. The Hungarian churches — primarily the Catholic Church — have made use of the favourable opportunities that have presented themselves to develop their tactics in order to consolidate their religious world view. (They have expanded the sphere of their religious activities; they attempt to conceal and obscure the antagonistic conflicts that exist between the ideas of religion and Marxism-Leninism; they claim that those who are not religious cannot be truly civilised; stressing the positive role of religious morality, they declare that without religion there is no morality, that only religion can truly offer a moral upbringing, etc.)

4. By "religious world view" we mean all those idealist views which are disseminated by all the churches and religious sects, and which attribute fantastic, superhuman and mystical qualities to natural and social phenomena.

(a) There is an irreconcilable conflict

between the religious world view and Marxism-Leninism. With the weapons of Marxism-Leninism we will wage war on religious ideology until that world view has disappeared from the consciousness of men.

(b) One of the forms of contradiction within the people lies concealed between the religious conviction of those citizens who are believers and the tasks of the construction of socialism. This contradiction is of a non-antagonistic nature. It will gradually be resolved as the political, economic and cultural tasks that arise during the construction of socialism are accomplished. In this way it will completely disappear.

5. Clerical reaction is political reaction in religious guise. For this reason the struggle against it is political.

(a) The clerical forces of reaction try to draw believers under reactionary political influence by means of their religious world view. The conflict between the socialist social system and clerical reaction, and the class conflict between the working class and the reactionary classes, are of an irreconcilable, antagonistic kind. So we use political methods to continue the struggle against clerical reaction, just as against any other political enemies of the socialist state.

(b) We must not confuse the means employed in the struggle against religion as a world view with those used against clerical reaction. In the former we use methods of instruction and education, while in the latter political and administrative means are required.

(c) In stressing that the struggles against religion and clerical reaction should not be confused we do not mean that clericalism can be totally separated from religion. On the contrary, the religious world view and clerical reaction are closely linked. Clericalism appears in religious guise, concealed behind the mask of religion. Nevertheless we

must make clear distinctions in the means used in the struggle against each of them.

(d) It is possible and necessary to draw upright religious people — indeed, some church individuals too — into the struggle against clerical reaction.

6. The party's standpoint on the churches is as follows. During the era of the construction of socialism the churches will survive for a long time. While crushing the counter-revolutionary activities of clerical reactionaries, we seek to achieve positive cooperation with the churches. The form that this cooperation takes is determined by the requirements of the building of socialism. The state's cooperation with the churches as it constructs socialism is temporary, but will continue for a long time, embracing a whole historical epoch.

Directives for the Struggle against the Religious World View and for the Instruction and Education Work among the Religious Masses

1. Our party always subordinates its activities related to religion to the interests of the general political struggle and the class struggle. The struggle against the religious world view is one part of the general class struggle. For us the main question is not who is religious and who is atheist. For this would mean that the main front of the war would be transferred from the conflict between capitalism and socialism to that between religious and non-religious workers. The main point is that the workers, the working peasants and the intelligentsia should be invited in fraternal collaboration and agreement to build the socialist future. For the victory of socialism will remove the social basis of religion. We judge men not by their beliefs but by their class position, their political views

and their actions. All our ideological tasks that are related to religion should be decided from this point of view.

2. Religion is a reactionary world view, because it is one of the ideological weapons of the opponents of progress. Its roots are class society and ignorance. The victory of socialism and the elimination of class society remove the social basis of religious ideologies. The advance of science gradually drives out the mystical and unscientific teachings of religion from the fields of the natural and social sciences and of thought. Thus it abolishes the spiritual foundation of religion: ignorance. However this is a lengthy process that takes decades. It requires dogged persevering work and patient methods.

3. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat one of the main tasks of the state is the socialist reeducation of the whole people. This includes the patient ideological struggle against religious views. At the same time as far as the exercise of civil rights is concerned, the state considers religion a private matter.

(a) It is the task of every state school, university, training college, and state educational institute to propagate the sciences and the scientific materialist world view. The state offers assistance to social organisations and institutions too in carrying out this work, ensuring above all total freedom to disseminate this world view.

(b) The ideological struggle against the religious world view should not offend the religious sentiments of believers, nor should it infringe the freedom of religious practice. The state is guided in its dealings with the churches by the objective of loyalty, and it offers financial support for the churches to fulfil their functions. At the same time the churches' freedom of church activity cannot infringe the freedom to disseminate the scientific materialist world view.

4. Religion cannot be a private matter for the party and its members.

(a) Our party wages war at the level of world views against bourgeois ideology, and therefore against religious ideas too. The ideological war against the religious world view is the war of the party's world view, Marxism-Leninism, against idealism. There can be no compromises in this struggle. It is the principle of this struggle that the old and obsolete world view should be totally destroyed. To achieve this the combined efforts of all party members are needed. This struggle must be conducted to varying degrees by all members even within their own minds against the erroneous ideas that they often hold. Party members who are still religious and have not broken completely with religious fallacies must be made to understand that for party members religion cannot be considered a private matter. They are bringing foreign and hostile views into the party through their religious attitudes. But hostile views have no place in the party. Such views disrupt party unity and pose a serious danger to the power of the working class. The party membership must realise that the religious idealist world view serves the interests of the reactionary classes of the past. It is incompatible with the world view of the Marxist-Leninist Party of the working class, dialectical materialism.

(b) The majority of religious party members are fighting the remnants of religious ideology in their minds. Comradely help and patient instruction are needed in this struggle. Instruction and teaching can gradually make religious party members sever themselves from the religious ideas they have retained. The tools of persuasion and education must exert influence on party members not to attend religious ceremonies and to

instruct their families to the same effect. Religious party members may not take part in religious processions.

Some party members justify their participation in religious ceremonies by saying that they are responding to the pressure of public opinion. They claim that their attendance serves to strengthen relations with the masses. Such opportunist views harm relations between the party and the masses. The party naturally takes notice of public opinion, but it cannot come under the influence of public opinion that is burdened by religious self-ignorance and spiritual oppression. On the contrary! The party must shape and influence such public opinion as this.

(c) Participation in church or religious ceremonies by party officers, independent workers in the party apparatus and leading members of local party branches is not to be tolerated. A distinction should be drawn between active and passive participation in such ceremonies. If a party officer makes a personal decision to baptise his children, send them to religious classes, or have them confirmed, if he organises a church wedding, goes to church or takes part in religious processions, he must face party discipline for his religious actions, and be barred from holding party office. However on countless occasions party officers attend certain church ceremonies under force of circumstance, rather than through personal choice: for instance, when attending a funeral, or when invited to a christening or a wedding. Naturally such unavoidable duties may occur even today, and they should be judged entirely differently. With regard to funerals, we must gradually achieve the goal whereby on their deaths party members receive workers' movement funerals. Furthermore we must adopt such official civil funeral ceremonies as will gradually displace church

ceremonies.

(d) The party cannot tolerate the dissemination of religious views within its ranks. Party members who ignore warnings and persist in disseminating such views either inside or outside the party are not fit to be members of a Marxist-Leninist party. They must be expelled from the party. Religious people cannot fill party posts. Those belonging to the various religious sects cannot become members of the party.

(e) Essential to the success of mass enlightenment and mass education work are Marxist-Leninist instruction and political training of the party membership. For this work cannot achieve any results amongst those outside the party if the religious views of a section of the party membership disturb the discernment of the workers. It is most important that party members be fully aware of the reactionary role that is essential to religion. To this end it is necessary that party members receive systematic instruction in Marxist-Leninist ideology. Bearing in mind the need for a gradual approach, the teachings of dialectical materialism must be put forward with the greatest possible effect in party propaganda. This work amongst the religious masses can achieve results only if we take action against all kinds of right-wing opportunist views, left-wing sectarian views, and attempts at reconciliation. In this matter too, right-wing opportunism represents the main danger. The party must continue the ideological and political struggle against the various forms it takes in the religious question. This opportunism talks of the sensitivity of the religious masses and lays down its arms before religious prejudices. Fear and retreat in the face of the struggle against religious views represent a manifestation of bourgeois opportunism. These are identical in their effect: they open the door to

bourgeois ideology. So they are extremely dangerous for both the party and the dictatorship of the proletariat. We must also determinedly put an end to left-wing sectarian views that generally breed mistrust of all religious people and consider them reactionaries. Such a standpoint damages the strengthening of relations between the party and the masses. It must be clearly understood that a large number of religious believers do want socialism. Religious people are not equivalent to the enemies of socialism. A person may at one and the same time be a religious believer, a loyal citizen of the People's Republic of Hungary, and an active participant in the building of socialism.

(f) Marxist-Leninist propaganda must be intensified among non-party officers in the armed forces, teachers, and non-party people holding leading state posts (at district, county and national levels). Persuasion and instruction must be used so that those belonging to these categories gradually abandon their religious beliefs.

5. Direct and indirect means alike must be used in the instruction of the various strata of society. We must always bear in mind gradual change and the level of ideological and political training that people have.

(a) Among the more backward workers, working peasants, women and young people, indirect opportunities for propaganda must be used, as presented by the natural and social sciences when given a proper ideological foundation. For example the latest achievements of modern science in the fields of astronomy, physics, biology, etc. should be reported in order to refute effectively the anti-scientific dogmas of religion. In our natural science propaganda we must ensure that the conclusions drawn are of an unambiguous and clear Marxist ideological nature. Social science propaganda must

make use of the heritage of the enlightenment's classical atheist traditions both in Hungary and in other countries.

(b) Within the party and among advanced workers the direct means of lectures should be employed: these should cover the origins of religion and Christianity, the role of clerical reaction, the anti-scientific bias of religion, etc. Such lectures should even be held in villages, given the proper conditions.

(c) In the ideological training of scientific cadres, but also of the intelligentsia in general, special consideration must be given to convincing them of the correctness of the teachings of dialectical and historical materialism in the individual branches of the sciences.

6. Directives for political instruction against clerical reaction:

(a) Party organisations and state and social organisations should systematically explain the role of clerical reaction in Hungarian history as opponents of progress and traitors. Support for this must be taken from the anti-clerical heritage of progressive Hungarian thinkers, writers, scholars and politicians. The shameful role of the clerical forces of reaction in the Horthy era, during the Second World War, after the liberation, during the counter-revolution and also in the period after the counter-revolution: this must all be exposed. An increasing amount of local material on these subjects must be used in agitation and propaganda. It is especially important to expose the present activities of the clerical forces of reaction. Church reactionaries use every available means to disrupt the progressive movement within the churches. Much of the activity is conducted among women and youngsters, and takes both legal and illegal forms. The reactionaries rely heavily on the opportunities presented by the churches' inter-

national contacts. The forces of reaction within the churches maintain contact with reactionary forces outside the churches. The struggle against clerical reaction can be waged only through multi-faceted political work amongst the masses. Administrative measures here will be effective only if preceded by and supported by the political convictions of the masses. The struggle against clerical reaction is the common task of party and state organisation.

(b) Anti-clerical propaganda and agitation will make an impact and bring results only if it systematically exposes the international role of church reactionaries and the activities they pursue against the Hungarian People's Republic. National public opinion must be informed of the counter-revolutionary political actions of the Vatican, and of the Pope himself, by which they tried to hinder the process of consolidation within the country after the defeat of the counter-revolution. We must reveal the identity of interests of the Vatican and the imperial monopolies. We must clarify the roles of the Catholic parties and Christian Socialist movements in Western countries. We must look at the activities and reactionary role of the Protestant World Council of Churches. We must reveal the role of the churches in capitalist countries.

Footnote to party document (1958):

After the defeat of the counter-revolution in autumn 1956 both the theory and the practice of political cooperation between the socialist state and the churches had to be clarified. This was particularly justified by the historical circumstances of these years. For this purpose the Politburo dealt with the development of church-state relations in its meeting on 10 June 1958. It declared that

from the liberation until 1948-50 relations had been characterised by political struggle. The victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the strengthening of the power of the working class made it possible for the state to reach an agreement with the churches. (Agreements were concluded with the Protestant churches in 1948, and with the Catholic Church in 1950.) The essence of the agreements was that on the one side the state ensures religious freedom, guarantees the opportunities for the churches to operate, and offers a certain amount of financial support; on the other side the churches respect the laws of the state, and support the government's political efforts to promote peace, the collaboration of national forces, and the raising of living standards. It was agreed that any problems that arose in the future in church-state relations should be settled through discussions and agreements.

The agreements created a new situation in church-state relations, but did not put an end to the struggle. Nonetheless the influence of reactionary forces did decrease. In 1950 the Catholic Priests' Peace Council was formed with the participation of more progressive priests. But the extremely conservative elements of the church — particularly in 1956 — not only attacked all more progressive ideas, but also took active steps against our People's Democracy. In spring 1957 priests' peace organisations which were new in both form and composition were formed to replace the Catholic priests' peace movement which was broken up during the counter-revolution. The Catholic Committee of the National Peace Council was founded, which organisationally belongs to that Council. Its members are at the same time members of Opus Pacis.

The starting point for the Politburo

was that lasting sound relations and political co-operation between the state and the churches are necessary and possible. It set down in its resolution the basic principles of church-state relations. These declare that the churches should offer more resolute support for the state and the social order of the Hungarian People's Republic and for the building of socialism because this corresponds with the interests both of the people and of religiously-inclined workers. They should be actively involved in the struggle to preserve world peace on the basis of the idea of friendship between peoples. Furthermore, progressive church figures should participate — as indeed they are already doing — in the Patriotic People's Front, the Peace Council, and the church peace committees; and they should receive representation in Parliament and in the work of local organisations. The state authorities guarantee religious freedom, and by their financial support make it possible for the churches to operate. Church leaders on the other hand should not tolerate

the activities of church reactionaries against our system, and they should struggle against the forces of church reaction.

Alongside the tasks to be solved in this field the Politburo recommends to the government that a fortnightly paper should be published under the supervision of the Catholic Committee of the National Peace Council. The ideological standpoint of the HSWP, which has shown consistency, tolerance and realism, and the strengthening of socialism in our country and internationally have contributed to positive developments in this complex area. The resolution states that:

The camp of progressively-minded individuals in the churches and among church leaders . . . grows in size from day to day . . . They now understand the laws of social development and they have drawn appropriate conclusions: they have decided in the interests of the survival and unity of the church that they should support the power of the working class and the work of constructing socialism.

The Problems of the Family in a Totalitarian State

Dr Václav Benda, a Czech Catholic philosopher and former Charter '77 spokesman, was born in 1946. He gained his doctorate from Charles University, Prague, in 1970 and was assistant professor of philosophy at the same university until his dismissal for political reasons in 1971. Since signing Charter '77 in 1977, Dr Benda has held a variety of jobs, most recently working as a stoker in a Prague hotel. A founding member of VONS, the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted,

Benda was arrested in 1979 and received a four-year prison sentence for "subversion of the Republic".

Václav Benda is the author of numerous political and philosophical documents published in samizdat form. In addition he has written many short articles dealing with religious and moral questions. "The Problems of the Family in a Totalitarian State", written in 1984, develops the theme of the role of Christians in totalitarian societies raised in "Catholicism and Politics in