



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN COLOMBIA

News releases from Colombia, South America, continue to unfold a program of religious oppression. A new order, dated January 28, 1954, puts Protestantism under new curbs throughout the nation. Previous restricting orders had been issued September 3 and October 24, 1953.

Alarmed by the vigorous growth of Protestant Christianity (51% increase in membership from 1948 to 1953), Colombia's pro-clerical government has acted to tighten the restrictions already imposed upon its small religious minority. By means of Circular 310, issued January 28, this year, the Minister of Government, Lucio Pabon Nunez, announced the following official position:

1. Protestant Colombians and foreigners are forbidden to make any public manifestation of their religious faith outside of Churches and Chapels set apart for that purpose;
2. As a further restriction, Colombian Protestants in the "Mission Territories" (3/4 of the area of the nation) are expressly denied the right to have schools for the education of their children; and,
3. Protestants in Colombia may not engage in any activity which might attract others to their faith.

With the promulgation of the new order, the government of Lt.-Gen. Rojas Pinilla has moved to an extreme anti-Protestant position far beyond that of arch-Conservative, ex-President Laureano Gomez. The new limitations on the freedom of Protestants in Colombia contravene the principles of religious liberty maintained by most governments outside the territories under Communist rule.

Catholic Church Approves Curbs. Liberal-minded Colombians who expected that the Roman Catholic Church would be the first to protest the government's un-Christian denial of religious liberty are surprised

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to find the hierarchy applauding the move and cooperating wholeheartedly in the program to suppress the Protestant Church.

Immediately after the government issued its new order, Cardinal Luque, Archbishop of Bogota, publicly expressed "the complete conformity of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Colombia with the Circular 310, relating to the practice and propagation of non-Catholic religions." The order proscribing Protestantism, said the cardinal, was "an immense benefit to the nation."

THE CONSTITUTION AND THE HEARINGS

Our national Government was organized on the principle of "separation of powers", i.e., three branches were set up each of which was given a sphere of action of its own within which it would have definite responsibility. These three branches of the Government, administration, legislature, and judiciary, however, were to be interlocked in a "check and balance" system so that no one branch could jeopardize the basic freedom of the individual citizens.

The provisions in the Constitution for unified action among the three branches are very limited. The result has been that the political parties, which are completely extra-constitutional, have taken over this unifying function. Traditionally the political party in power has put the needed pressures on both the administration and the legislature so that they have worked in more or less the same direction. Those occasional times when one party has controlled the administration and the other party has controlled the legislature have ordinarily been periods of stagnation on the part of the Government as a whole.

Seldom in our history have these principles and these relationships been so confused as they are at the present time. To turn on the radio or television and watch a Committee from the legislative branch conduct a "hearing" in which a top administrative officer is questioned and heckled by legislative members of the same political party is a clear indication that something strange is happening to the American constitutional system.

The American Constitution does not make the administrative branch "responsible" to the legislative branch as does the British system. In the British system of government the top administrators must hold seats in the legislative branch and so serve as leaders for both branches. The whole Cabinet must answer to the legislature, and resign when asked to do so. Our framers of the Constitution, however, deliberately turned away from that plan as being lacking in protection for the freedom of the people. Are we now in the process of making a basic change in our Government without even knowing what we are doing? The job of our United States legislature is to make our laws, and its investigative functions are germane to that task, certainly not to the evaluation of the policies of high administrative officers. To add that

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function would mean to discard our constitutional principles even though we pass no amendment on the subject.

It was because of these principles that Secretary Stevens took his stand in defense of the Army and of the independence of the administrative branch. For reasons which they must explain for themselves, however, the party leaders did not adequately come to his rescue. A party caucus under able leadership, not a public hearing, was needed. Any inadequacy in Secretary Stevens or in the Army is the business of the President. The obstreperous methods of the junior senator from Wisconsin, on the other hand, were at once the problem of the Republican Party and of the Senate. The hearings have made it abundantly clear that weakness and poor political planning are the main elements in the soil which has produced both the rambunctious senator and our present embarrassment.

Unfortunately, just at the time when we needed most cooperation and strength in the Government as a whole we came upon a time of turmoil between these two major branches of our Government. During the early part of this legislative session many weeks were spent in an effort to bring the affairs of the State Department under a larger measure of control by the legislative branch. There, too, the Administration was compelled to defend itself, for the Republican Party did not resolve the conflict between its own members in the two branches. While the Bricker amendment was ostensibly pushed to guard our "national interests" against the international welfare programs in the United Nations, it was clearly designed also to limit the administrative branch in its negotiations for our "national interests." Basically then, it was a move to cut down the powers now available to the Administration.

These strains have placed Secretary Dulles and the State Department in a very difficult situation in the current diplomatic maneuvers regarding Indo-China and the Asiatic problems. Congress cannot negotiate. The State Department's information must be kept confidential, and so also its specific objectives. Currently, however, the Department lacks solid backing at home, with the result that our diplomats lack influence at the green tables abroad.

The cost to the nation and to the world of undisciplined political ambitions is difficult to calculate at the present time.

EXCHANGE OF PERSONS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

As you may know, the House of Representatives recently voted an appropriation bill which covers the State Department providing only \$9,000,000 for the Exchange of Persons Educational Program. This is \$6,000,000 less than the Department requested and \$12,000,000 less than was spent last year. This cut will definitely curtail and, in large measure, destroy the program, particularly so inasmuch as it

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provides only a small amount of dollar purchasing power. The larger share of the \$9,000,000 must be spent abroad since it consists of foreign credits.

Unless the Senate takes action to restore this sum, it apparently will drastically reduce a program that seems to me to be one of the most constructive approaches which we have made to the problem of foreign good will and understanding. The basic struggle now is for the minds of the people. Our concern about Communism must be handled at that level. Investigations, court decisions, legislation against the party, and even the curtailment of citizenship are all penal, coercive stop-gaps. It is reported that the sub-committee recommendation on this item was made by a four to three vote and the committee recommendation was approved in the House without being challenged for discussion.

From conversations here it seems that the cut is simply an economy measure with no other policy moves included. Since we do have billions for defense, for the bolstering of the economy, and for our own enjoyment, it would seem that we ought to have some funds for international good will. In the long run, education will be cheaper than war.

Personally, I feel that the situation should be given enough correspondence pressure to make the members of the Senate committee aware that there is some public interest in this matter.

If you have a conviction, write, soon.

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