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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Release of political prisoners in Central and Eastern Europe

Report
Relations with European Non-Member Countries
Rapporteur: Mr Peter STRASSER, Austria

A. Draft Resolution presented by the Committee on Non-represented Nations

The Assembly,

Having regard to its Resolution 107 on steps to secure the release of political prisoners in Central and Eastern Europe;

Noting that a large number of political prisoners have not yet been released and that a new wave of arrests and deportations has taken place in Hungary and in the Soviet Zone of Germany,

Calls once more upon world opinion to appeal for t h e immediate release of t h e persons concerned.

B. Explanatory Memorandum by M. STRASSER

1.

1. On 22nd October 1957, the Assembly referred to the Committee on non-represented Nations la Motion for a Resolution, presented by M. Wistrand and others, calling for the release of political prisoners in Central and Eastern Europe. The Motion made reference to Resolution 107 of 26th October 1956, in which the Assembly urged the release of political prisoners in Eastern Europe.

2. Your Committee has taken note of the further step taken by M. Wistrand. It considers that the situation calls for a renewed affirmation of the Assembly's attitude in regard to the tragic fate of people detained in appalling conditions for political reasons. Your Committee believes it to be the duty of the Assembly to persevere in its efforts to obtain their release.

3. Your Committee is in possession of precise information concerning a large number of the persons detained. It is clear t h a t after the passing phase of clemency following the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Union Communist Party the situation again became more serious in almost all the Communistdominated countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In Hungary, for example, the number of persons imprisoned or interned now exceeds the number of political prisoners who were detained in camps and prisons under the Rakosi terrorist regime. Yet, the number of arrests and executions admitted by the Kadar Government is only a small fraction of the true number. It may be noted, incidentally, that the vast labour camp at Recz has been reopened.

All these people have been imprisoned or deported for political reasons, in most cases for expressing opinions not tolerated by the present regime. It is certain that their detention has been ordered either by the mere decision of the secret police or by a " tribunal " which is far from being the " independent and impartial tribunal " stipulated in Article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We need only mention as examples the names of Tibor Dery, Adam Gyorgy, Chairman of the Committee of Intellectuals, Sandor Racz, Chairman of the Workers' Council of Budapest, Istvan Bibo, university professor and former Minister, President Imre Nagy, General Maleter and others...

The same remark applies to Yugoslavia, to mention only the case of M. Djilas. Eastern Germany, only a few weeks ago, witnessed a wave of arrests, particularly among the Protestant clergy. The most flagrant case is that of Pastor Schmutzler, Protestant almoner to the University of Leipzig, who was sentenced on 28th November 1957, to five years hard labour for " incitement to boycotting ". The case was heard before a Communist tribunal, the only members of the public allowed to attend being militant Communists.

4. The situation of all these prisoners is not unlike that of the Christian martyrs. Like them they are subjected to inhuman treatment simply because their conscience does not allow them to share the ideas of those in power. Most of them are not even guilty of active opposition to the régime : Mme. Julia Rajk, for example, who has been deported, took no part in the revolt; she was not in Hungary at the time and did not return to Budapest until 3rd November 1956. In such a situation, it behoves us as the elected representatives of the free peoples of Europe to lift up our voices in an appeal for their release.