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FATHER BULANYI AND THE PACIFIST CONTROVERSY IN HUNGARY, 1976-1987
by Lawrence Klippenstein

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The confrontation with Father Gárgy Bulányi, and his followers of the basic communities known as Bokor [The Bush] remains a complex problem for the Catholics and also the government of Hungary. If the recent pronouncements handed down from the Vatican itself are taken at face value, one might think it is simply a deviation on the question of church order that is at stake. Here at least there is nothing to suggest that a more thorny issue not simply of theology but of church-state relations lies behind the struggle.1 Pacifism and conscientious objection, we are reminded by some observers, is really at the heart of various difficulties which are facing this embroiled Piarist priest to the present day.

As one analyst clearly implies, it may actually be the peace position of Father Bulányi which has retained for him a measure of protection against the forces which pursue him in his homeland, and perhaps in Rome as well. The statement of the Sacred Congregation of Faith long awaited as a possible strong condemnation of Bulanyist teachings, seems to reflect a reluctance to give any evidence of bowing to the state pressures aimed at silencing Bulányi and his supporters. Their claims for military service exemption have been a thorn in the flesh for church and state alike, but removing it seemingly is more easily said than done.

Discussion of the internal struggles regarding "The Bush" and its leader usually mention the military service questions raised in these religious circles. However, a comprehensive analysis, or even a simple survey of this particular aspect of the dilemma has hardly been attempted to date.2 This article will seek to fill in part of the gap, that is provide a sketch of the way in which the Bulanyist pacifist protest arose, and how it has come to be the public debate that began about a decade ago.

The basic communities which arose in Hungary after WWII faced a period of strong harassment in the fifties and sixties.3 Many of its leaders were imprisoned for a time, including Father Bulányi who had been involved in renewal activities of the church already during the war. The situation changed considerably in 1976 when the Catholic Council of Bishops began to
discuss the whole phenomenon of basic communities seriously, and when Cardinal Laszlo Lekai became the Primate of the Catholic Church in Hungary. The Bench of Bishops had agreed already in 1950 to take action "against church persons who act in a way contrary to the legally anchored order of the Hungarian People's Republic or the government's advancement of socialism", and the state let it be known that the new Primate would be expected to abide quite literally by that arrangement. However, most of the imprisoned leaders were set free, and the basic communities could function more normally again.

Cardinal Lekai aimed his first pastoral letter directly at the basic communities, warning them not to stray from the true church, and calling them to obedience of the hierarchy at all times. At the conference of Bishops which had taken up discussion of this theme at its 1976 sessions, the Cardinal also handed out a list of clergymen, that is, names in Bulányist circles whom he wished to see disciplined in their various dioceses. The appearance of the first conscientious objectors in the Bulány groups gave the ensuing discussions a political dimension which would increasingly heighten conflict with the hierarchy since it now had to take into consideration related state policies as well.

Károly Kiszely wrote, when he talked about his objection to military service, that the Bulányist basic communities had not begun to assert their pacifism prior to his protest in 1976. At that point, he said, "it was unimaginable for a Catholic to do such a thing as refuse military service." At the court session which quickly followed his publicized refusal, Kiszely's appeal was rejected in five minutes and by the end of the year he found himself in a prison cell where he would stay for thirty-three months without the privilege of parole.

In 1979 Dr. József Merza, then a 51-year-old mathematician and a member of the Bulányist circle, also refused conscription. He was imprisoned for six months. After that he was transferred to an asylum, and upon his release he lost his job as a researcher in the Institute of Mathematics. Some Catholic clerics and lay persons submitted a petition to the Bench of Bishops in the year of Merza's imprisonment, asking the hierarchy to intervene in the spirit of Vatican II. They also asked for an alternative form of civilian service more in keeping with their Christian vocation. Whether the appeal actually affected Merza's case is unknown.

Cardinal Lekai had been attempting, unsuccessfully, during this time to have Father Bulányi sent abroad. In 1980 he repeated an earlier statement sorting out the good basic communities from the bad ones, the latter referring once more to those headed by Father Bulányi. Some of his followers felt at that time that the issue of bearing of arms was by now a factor in setting up the Cardinal's definition.
There was reason to support that view in the move made by Lekai late in the summer of 1981. On September 6, he suspended summarily from his parish duties, the popular youth chaplain and Bulányist contact person, Father László Kovács of Budapest. Charged with "refusal to obey" and "scandalous" behaviors, Kovács faced as well the accusation of misleading the people on the question of pacifism and military work.  

When the Cardinal appeared on the same day as the suspension to read a homily commemorating the 125th anniversary of the reconsecration of the basilica in Esztergom, he included in his comments a strong condemnation of pacifism among Catholic believers.

I am disturbed to see that certain extremist priests and members of our flock are inciting the youth to refuse their bounden duty of military service. What is worse, these people are goading young people to say "Nay" to military service, precisely because they are Catholics of profound faith. 

In his judgment against Kovács he referred to the issue as follows:

I must emphasize that he (Kovács) publicly criticizes the regulations prescribing military conscription according to the laws of the state. His views on this matter may be interpreted in the sense that military service is a matter for personal conscience alone. 

As the Cardinal put it further, those who were refusing military service had been "misled". Such persons, he said, "blindly and unfeelingly turn their backs on the lessons of national history." Self defense is right, he pointed out, and added, "Strength is right. The Church approves of organized force in the struggle to avoid war."

Hundreds of letters arrived at the Primate's office, protesting his action against Kovács and the anti-pacifist statements of his homily. One by a country curate, Andras Groman, was among them. In his own sermons, moreover, he made common cause with Father Kovács. The admitted that the official teachings of the church, including Vatican II, do not forbid military service. But, he wrote, the same texts also allow for refusal of service, and then added: "To see that the Head of our Catholic Church is as good as glorifying war, through his historical parallels today, when mankind is being threatened by the catastrophe of total annihilation, . . . I deeply regret." 

Gromon expressed his love in Christ for the Cardinal, and also his hope that the same sentiment would characterize the Primate's reply. Shortly afterwards, at the end of October, Gromon was also suspended from the right to perform his priestly duties, "in order to avoid a scandal", as the Bishop of Székesfehérvár, Imre Kisberk, explained the action. Gromon was ordered to return to his home village, and report to the local parish. The Austrian news agency, Kathpress, said in its report on the two actions that it was "not known if they were connected."
The cases of Kovács and Gromon raised the public discussion of conscientious objection to a level hitherto unknown. Cardinal Lekai's decision received the open support of Bishop Cserháti, as one would expect, and also the Secretariat of the Catholic Commission of the Hungarian National Front Peace Council. Chaplain József Bákonyi of the Secretariat dubbed as "untenable" and "uncatholic" a whole list of tendencies and activities in the Bulányist movement—the desire to destroy solidarity, open confrontation with the state, a search for martyrdom, conscientious objection, aiming to change church structure, and criticism of the hierarchy. Imre Biro, general secretary of the Secretariat maintained that one "must learn to defend one's country just as one learns to do creative work." A full session of the executive committee stressed that the peace movement must vigorously counteract the "division" tendencies of certain basic groups, and the propaganda of the conscientious objectors.16

Bishop Cserháti defended the Cardinal's actions against the priests, but denied that the actions of pacifism supported by Kovács had anything to do with his suspension. He intimated that it was rather the issues of theological aberrations and resistance to discipline which had led the Cardinal to act as he had. Speaking to Kathpress in an interview where these matters were discussed, the bishop pointed out that the call for an alternative service program would be a concern first of all of the state. In his words

It is natural that the state should give attention to calls for an alternative to military service—which, in fact, does not exist in Hungary. One may assume that the state would have little sympathy for conscientious objectors. I assume that the situation is not much different in your state [meaning Austria].17

Conscientious objectors, therefore, needed to find other means of support. Their situation was, however, gaining wider attention, and they soon gained allies in other sectors of the populace.

In October 1981, their concerns were publicized in a new samizdat journal, Beszélő, begun by a Jewish dissident group in Hungary, the Democratic Opposition Front. In pointing to gaps of information which the new periodical hoped to fill, the editors mentioned independent religious groups and "lonely truth seekers" perhaps unrelated to groups of any kind. It was evident very soon that these categories would include basic communities and the conscientious objectors in their midst.18

In addition to this, six priests submitted a memorandum of protest to Cardinal Lekai himself. It praised concerns about the Kovács-Gromon suspensions, and then went on to condemn the negative views on pacifists and conscientious objectors expressed in the Cardinal's September 6 commemorative address. These, contended the protestors, contradicted the II Vatican Council. The memorandum also pointed out that Kovács had in fact not been forbidden to speak by local priests,
as the secretary of the archdiocese of Kalocsa, Geza Kovács, had told the Cardinal. The signators wanted a total reorientation within the hierarchy.

Considering the present situation when even the big powers are discussing disarmament, we cannot understand why the head of the Hungarian church should be carrying a torch for military might. In our opinion he should rather follow the example of the Evangelical Church in the GDR, which finds itself in an even more difficult position... We ask that the decisions regarding Kovács and Gromon be reversed...

Meanwhile Cardinal Lekai hoped to deal with the Bulányi difficulties by seeking to indict the pater himself. Father Bulányi was asked to appear before a commission of four professors of theology to discuss views which "were difficult to reconcile with the teachings of the Hungarian Church." In a letter of March 7 Father Bulányi explained why he could not accept this or similar invitations. He took the opportunity to include a statement of his group's view on "service for life" as a tenet which undergirded his pacifist position. In a final communiqué from the Bench of Bishops, Father Bulányi was urged once more "to give up his opposition and submit himself to the Bench of Bishops' views on uniform pastoral activity."20

When some readers of Hungary's only Catholic newspaper, Uj Ember, asked for a clarification of the Bench of Bishops' condemnation of Bulányist views, they were answered promptly with a wide-ranging elaboration of the "trouble-making" teachings of Father Bulányi. The statement made no reference to pacifism, however. Still, it was a closely argued case, and a showdown seemed to be in the making.21 Cardinal Lekai himself continued to highlight the Bulányi affair. On 16 May 1982, he refused to co-celebrate mass with Father Bulányi and Father Kovács at a youth pilgrimage held at Nagmaros.22

State authorities continued to keep their distance publicly from the entire conflict. In a broadcast by Radio Homeland on 11 June 1982, State Secretary for Church Affairs, Imre Miklos, once again affirmed the neutrality of the Hungarian government as far as this particular case was concerned.23 It was something to be settled by the church itself, he insisted. An appeal to the Holy See might be necessary, he added. He mentioned that some conscientious objectors associated with Father Bulányi had been placed under arrest, a clear indication that this aspect of the problem was being kept under consideration.

That feature of the situation could, in fact, not really be shrugged off easily. The third issue of Bessélo had just reported the details on the trials of two Catholics who had refused to perform military service, and who had been sentenced on April to prison terms of thirty-two months and sixteen months respectively. It also published appeal texts by Gábor Csizmadia and
Béla Simonyi, lodged in late winter that year. The article added the further fact that eight Hungarian Catholics had been sentenced for that offense since 1979, four of whom were still in prison.24

Then the Bench of Bishops made their next decisive move regarding Father Bulányi himself. At its spring meeting on June 6-9, the conference consulted once more on the case. Father Bulányi himself was twice called to recant of his heretical views, and refused each time. At this point the Vatican took the matter in hand and requested that the whole matter be transferred to the Congregation of Faith in Rome for disposition as it saw fit. Until that happened, however, the bishops decreed that all archbishops and bishops of Hungary were to forbid Father Bulányi the performance of official priestly duties in their parishes.25

Csaba Kelemen, one of the contributors to Beszélo, had proposed that a compromise between the opposing parties in this controversy might be achieved if the Church were not so ready to yield to the will of the state, and thus gain its own ground on which to stand.26 He thought the church need not take the view that the Gospels forbid military service, but could accept rather the position of those Catholics who believed there was another way. The Bulanyists, stated Kelemen, might in turn take a more positive approach to the hierarchy, and thus tone down the conflict from their side as well.

An Austrian telecast on June 11, nevertheless, focused again on the yawning gulf itself.27 It reiterated the Cardinal's support of the state's right to place military service obligations on all its citizens, and the difficulties that would derive from Bulányi position if all Catholics would follow it. Father Bulányi once more pointed out then, that his basic communities were not opposing service obligations as such. They simply did not want to take up arms in performing it. He also expressed the hope that the Bench of Bishops would take up their case with state authorities soon.

When the Hungarian bishops visited the Pope "ad limina" in October, they were told to look for a "positive solution" which could quickly resolve the problems of the basic communities.28 At the year's end, Imre Miklos again shared his feelings about the pacifism issue. Hungary, he pointed out, "was witnessing attempts by which those who tendentiously spread pacifist ideas are also using teachings of the church to expand the possibilities of acquiring influence." As he saw it, pacifist basic communities had come under the influence of cold war forces and were attempting to express their hostile feelings toward socialism in religious disguise.29

The year 1983 would not really become a year of "resolution and reconciliation" for the participants in the ongoing debate. One of the Bulanyists, Gyula Simonyi, had written up a
"proposal for an amendment to the law" (meaning military service law) on Christmas Day, 1982. It was a carefully written document which was quickly followed by Károly Kiszely's "protest on legal grounds to the Chairman of the High Court of the Hungarian People's Republic," dated January 3, 1983.30 Here was clear evidence of legal expertise and well-argued logic, but their positive achievements of these statements were difficult to assess.

The Bench of Bishops and the Bulanyists had both hoped that an official response to the "ad limina" visit might help to clarify matters, but it did not do so very much.31 Obedience seemed to be the crucial issue at stake, both in the earlier bishops' decision, and now in the letter, dated April 3, 1983, which had come from Rome. The Bulanyists concluded from what was happening that disobedience as applied to them needed to be interpreted to mean that they were refusing the wish of the state to dissolve their groups, and that they were refusing to discontinue their retreats (something also desired by the state). They assumed also that the Cardinal had been forced to take an open stand on the issue of conscientious objection because the Bulanyists had taken that route, and the Cardinal was in no position to point out that military service was not, to begin with, a matter of discipline for the church.

Beyond that, Bulanyist commentators viewed the April papal letter as essentially affirming basic communities, supported as it was by the facts that Bulányi had not been officially censored by the Holy See, that he had not been forced to leave the country, and that his case had been transferred by the Hungarian Bench of Bishops to Rome itself. The bishops found some ammunition in the letter nonetheless. They were given support in their efforts to proceed against basic communities with an effort to make them toe the ecclesiastical line.32

What the conscientious objectors really wanted could be discerned in Karloly Kiszely's newest proposal for revision of Hungarian legislation to favor conscientious objectors. He reminded the state authorities that Hungary still lacked a law that truly guaranteed freedom of conscience with respect to military service. In more than two-thirds of European countries, he added, there is no requirement of compulsory military service, or else there is an option of doing social peace service completely apart from military administration. Some Eastern European countries are among the latter as well. A civilian service alternative has existed in Poland since 1979, Kiszely pointed out. In the GDR arrangements for an option of non combatant service has existed since the early 1960s. Kiszely suggested further than an alternative service program would allow those mostly honest and hardworking individuals to make a worthwhile contribution rather than spend time in prison. The whole proposal was carried in the journal Beszelo which inserted a special reply form for people to respond to the proposal.33
In a report sent the Helsinki Watch Committee, another Bulanyist Miklos Haraszti, had written

There is no possibility in Hungary to perform civil service as an alternative to military service. Every year thirty or forty persons prefer to accept imprisonment of 30-36 months instead of serving in the army. The law does not distinguish between persons doing so for reasons of conscience or other reasons.

The imprisonment of conscientious objectors is a violation of the Helsinki agreements. It includes religious discrimination also. The great majority of Christians must expect imprisonment from which members of two small groups are exempted. Believers are also forbidden to exercise freedom of religion while in the army.34

The State Office of Religious Affairs outlined its position once more in a letter of December 10, 1982. To an interest group in England, Imre Miklos had said, among other things:

The Hungarian State guarantees military service without arms to the members of those communities which dogma expressly forbids the use of arms, as in the case of Nazarenes and Jehovah's Witnesses.35

The dogma of other churches such as the Roman Catholic one do not forbid armed service, and they have never in the course of history demanded the introduction of and alternative civil service. Pope John Paul II, in his audience with the Hungarian bishops in Rome during the "ad limina" visit said that he considered it natural for Catholic theology students to fulfill their obligation to military service. The members of these churches have a duty to provide military service in correspondence with our laws.36

Taken as a whole, the year 1984 brought few substantive changes in the postures of parties or individuals involved in the pacifist controversy or in Bulanyi-Lekai discussions as a whole. One possible exception could be cited, however. The bishops, it appeared, sought to press their claims rather pointedly when they announced that the Piarist superior-general Pater Angel Ruiz had now reversed his earlier more sympathetic stance as far as Father Bulanyi was concerned. The Piarist director had sent copies of his revised point of view to five addresses: State Secretary Cardinal Casaroli of the Vatican, Cardinal Lekai, the Hungarian Piarist provincial Pater Varga, and Father Bulányi. In this letter Ruiz noted with approval the opinion of Archbishop Hamer, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Faith, that Father Bulányi ought to consider a period of study in Rome, or at least a visit for questioning, and that another option might be that of sending a commission of inquiry to Rome.37

In a May interview with Kathpress Father Bulányi restated his earlier responses to the charges laid against him by the Cardinal and the Bench of Bishops. His letters to the Cardinal, he said, had received no replies, and he could not get an audience with him either. He denied that the Regnumists ever urged him to obedience, and said he had, in his letters, restated his hopes that he might continue to be of service to the church. Bulányi recalled that 25 persons, who had intervened on his behalf when Cardinal Lekai had sought to have him called out of the country,
were henceforth forbidden to travel abroad. The travel passes had so far not been returned, he added.\textsuperscript{38}

On his side, Irme Miklos repeated that the state’s position toward conscientious objectors, remained unchanged. It took the lines of his public remarks in 1982, as well as the above-mentioned letter to British support groups written some months earlier.\textsuperscript{39}

The conscientious objectors held to their pacifist perspective. Young men like János Magyar who got a sentence of 34 months for refusing induction, and a priest, Father Mihály Lipien, who informed military offices in August that he could not pay his military taxes for reasons of Christian conscience, entered the ranks of Catholic pacifist dissidents at this time. Both had their plight publicized abroad.\textsuperscript{40} A fellow-resister, Gyula Simonyi, brought forward further suggestions for legal changes which could incorporate their concerns.\textsuperscript{41}

Simonyi contended that conscientious objectors were not politically motivated; they wanted much more to serve society in a positive way. Each case ought to be tested, he felt, with a view to seeing if it was based on political grounds or on the basis of "loving your enemy." Simonyi spoke again for a form of social service which would be performed in areas of special difficulties so that it could not be seen as a comfortable way of bypassing military duty.

In October the Hungarian church hierarchy announced that it was not awaiting a (new?) ruling on the question of whether young Catholics could claim exemption from military service. Bishop Cserháti, who was in touch with international organizations like Pax Christi, publicly expressed his hope (as had the Pope) that a positive resolution of the issue would be forthcoming soon. The remarks came in the wake of a peace seminar called in Budapest by Bishop Károly Tóth of the Hungarian Reformed Church.\textsuperscript{42} Just two months earlier, in the sentencing of János Magyar, the Cardinal had pointed out, however, that John Paul II himself had said in his most recent conversations with Hungarian bishops at Rome, that he assumed that Catholic theological students would serve in the military.\textsuperscript{43}

In mid-November Károly Kiszely had written to the Cardinal to point out what he saw to be the official teachings of the Catholic Church on the matter of military service.\textsuperscript{44} It taught three things, Kiszely pointed out:

1) no one should take up arms against their conscience;
2) no one should be forced to bear arms against their conscience;
3) the Church should make every effort to secure a fair and equitable settlement of the class of all conscientious objectors.

In his closing paragraphs he added:
I hereby plead with Your Eminence that you do not make your private views seem to be the official Catholic teaching when in fact these views are diametrically opposed to those of the Church.\textsuperscript{45}

If there had been a lull of activity at all on the pacifist "front", it was illusionary to think that the issue was going away. The past year has not been easier for the conscientious objectors since the issue came to public attention in 1980. First came the case of Father György Kocsi, chaplain of Nagyatad in southwest Hungary. His ordination has been challenged, albeit unsuccessfully, by the Office of State Affairs since 1980. Kocsi's contacts with an imprisoned conscientious objector, László Mohos, had led to the confiscation of a letter written by Kocsi to Mohos. In it, Kocsi complained about the violations of privacy in letter-writing, and about the two-faced attitude of the Pope toward conscientious objectors. Kocsi had the letter returned to him after writing to the prison authorities about the confiscation, and the punishment of Mohos to ten days isolation after the chaplain's visit.\textsuperscript{46}

Appraised of Kocsi's letter, Bishop J. Szendi called on the priest to withdraw his remarks about the Pope or face suspension. Kocsi claimed that his written remarks had been distorted, and that these criticisms, never publicly stated by himself, as they had in fact been by the chief editor of Uj Ember, Ferenc Magyar, were being used as a political ploy. The bishop had handed on a letter to a member of the theological commission which examined Bulányi under the auspices of the Bench of Bishops. It could be viewed as a prelude to formal suspension, if the earlier case of Father Bulányi could be taken as a strategy model for dealing with such protests.\textsuperscript{47}

In June the conscientious objectors themselves renewed their call for an end to laws that gave some religious groups military exemptions, and not others. The privileges enjoyed by Jehovah's Witnesses and the Nazarenes at present cannot be claimed by objectors from the Catholic, Lutheran, and Jewish communities, for example. Unconfirmed sources had come to put the number of imprisoned Catholics at 150. The state authorities insisted that they would give exemption only to those groups whose theological tenets explicitly did not allow military service for their members.\textsuperscript{48}

A recent issue of the samizdat periodical, A Hirondo, illustrated the point. It noted the efforts of Károly Kiszely, a conscientious objector who was imprisoned for 33 months between 1976 and 1979. The latter argued that he had been sentenced under discriminatory legislation which denied equality in the way it dealt with conscientious objectors. This defect, he said, needed to be corrected. Disabilities inflicted on conscientious objectors—making career advancement difficult, refusing travel permits, and closing opportunities to students— must be abolished. "Before the
courts," held Kiszely, "I ought to be judged not on the basis of being a Nazarene or Catholic, but as a Hungarian citizen." In a secret hearing, the Budapest court which heard Kiszely, threw out the appeal without dealing with his arguments.49

Hirondo went on to comment:

The secret provisions of government ministries such as those granting privileges to Jehovah's Witnesses and Nazarenes ought not to deal with basic questions which can lead to sentencing of individual. These provisions violate the constitution because they legalize religious discrimination. Only publicized legal provisions ought to bear validity in prescribing duties for citizens of the state.50

The writer had pointed out in the same statement that the 1977 joint declaration of the Defense Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior had issued, giving the right of exemption to members of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Nazarene sects, had been recategorized as "secret" a few days after its original publication.51

At mid-year there were hints that the commission dealing with constitutional matters might in fact be taking another look at the legislation pertaining to conscientious objectors. Government authorities intimated that they were simply waiting for some clarification on the part of the Catholic hierarchy. The chairman of the military court in Budapest had set forth the official church position of the hierarchy on the questions of grounds of conscience for those refusing to bear arms. Observers felt that this might suggest a readiness of the state to consider church views on this issue. It was assumed that Cardinal Lekai would initiate further discussions of the situation within the Bench of Bishops in Hungary.52

West German radio audiences heard Bishop Czerháti say some months later that the bishops could really do nothing to help conscientious objectors in Hungary. While affirming certain aspects of the Bálányi basic communities, the bishop went on to point out that the tensions between these communities and the bishops did not involve questions central to the Christian faith. When asked why Hungarians could not have an option such as Bausoldaten (construction units) of the GDR, the bishop replied that governments vary, and each must make its own decisions regarding internal affairs.53

Two days later, on October 17, Budapest reports in Kathpress brought the news of a 34-month prison sentence for György Hegyi, a Catholic member of a Bulanyist group whose house was searched on two occasions. Many of his religious writings were seized by the police. It was claimed that Hungarian law exempts persons like Hegyi in whose family the father is unable to work, while the mother is ill, and the second child is a minor.54 György's mother, Dr. Györgyné Hegyi, had written Cardinal Lekai just weeks after the sentencing in August that she would
appreciate his help in getting a reduction for he. She also pointed out again that the more severe punishments normally meted out to Catholics for violation of the Hungarian constitution which prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion. She and a close friend of the family had been excluded from the trial.

Among the more recent of these varied efforts to ameliorate the lot of imprisoned Hungarian Catholic conscientious objectors is a lengthy statement of grievances presented by Károly Kiszely to the Cultural Forum held in Budapest during the last weeks of October and the beginning of November 1985. On the evidence of documents which he offered to show any interested persons, Kiszely outlined a painful list of difficulties and deprivations suffered by those Hungarian Catholics and also others who objected to military service on grounds of conscience:

While this conference meets, you should know that there are about 150 law-abiding and peace-loving citizens of Hungary held in prisons because of their pacifist convictions. The court sessions which bring down the sentences cannot be considered to be court actions because these 150 have not been given a genuine court sentence. They are classed as common criminals, and occupy their cells along with common criminals. The minutes of the sessions are almost always falsified, the accused are pressured by threats and harassments to sign statements damaging to themselves. They are not informed about their rights. They are not given any defense. Only lawyers who will collaborate with the courts are allowed to participate . . . many court sessions are closed, sentences are handed down secretly, and not given in writing . . . Allegedly the court sessions re-open, but relatives and friends are not given accurate information so they can attend. . . . persons released from prison are forbidden to travel abroad for the next five to ten years. They may not attend universities and high schools, and their careers are hindered . . .

The majority of the sentenced objectors belong to small churches, but about 10 percent are Catholic. During the sentencing of some Catholic conscientious objectors, the military courts told the following falsehood: According to the teaching of the Catholic Church everyone is obligated to take up arms, even if it is against their conscience. Reports of the forum in western papers made no reference to this presentation. It may not have reached to plenum of the sessions.

The familiar lines of debate have continued through 1985 and 1986, indeed to this date. Keston News Service reported at the beginning of 1987 that twenty-four Hungarian Catholic priests had informed the Ministry of Defense that they would not perform any kind of military service. Most of them had served before, and were now serving notice about their attitude to any future call-ups. As these priests put it, "The sole viable way of peace is total powerlessness."

Partly in response to this move, no doubt, Bishop József Cserháti again told Hungarian Catholics that he could not help conscientious objectors because "one cannot change the regulations of the state." He reminded the viewers of Austrian television which carried his comments, that every state has the power to rule over its subjects, and that the church cannot take action against it. About that same time Cardinal Lekai received an appeal for assistance from a
mother of a Catholic conscientious objector, Görgy Hagyi who was jailed in August 1985 having been sentenced to 34 months in hard regime prison for refusing to bear arms. The letter appeared also in an issue of Beszelo, but there is little likelihood that the case will be given any special consideration.59

The bishop also shared his expectations that a final judgement on the Bulanyi case would be coming from Rome very shortly. In repeating his criticism of "The Bush," Bishop Cserháti has expressed some praise for the members as well.60 Soon after this came reports that another Catholic conscientious objector had been placed under arrest, making him, according to one report, the nineteenth Catholic CO to be imprisoned for refusing military service since 1979. It was also reported that about 20 Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested in February on the same charge.61

At this time Kiszely became the target to further restrictions. He was forbidden to travel about and to attend international disarmament conferences in Amsterdam and Paris on the grounds that it would "violate the public order." The Catholic peace activist had once again criticized the Hungarian bishops for refusing to intervene on behalf of the imprisoned and threatened Catholic COs.62

A lengthly new statement by the Hungarian bishops published in October suggested that the issue of pacifism had high priority but clung to all the familiar arguments used so far.63 It did, however, offer to Father Bulanyi and his supporters another occasion to publicize their own equally well-known position at a time when, as their rebuttal put it, "well over a hundred members of different denominations were serving harsh sentences in prison as conscientious objectors."64 Among the Catholics themselves, said the document, there were the recent imprisonments of Imre Szalei, a 24-year-old, sentenced at the end of October, 1986, and József Peller of Sopron, sentenced that same month for 36 months in prison.65

The statement further adduced the support of various European Catholic bishops who differ in their perspective from the Hungarian hierarchy on this matter. The bishops of the GDR are separately mentioned as expressing their respect to those who refuse to bear arms in military service on religious grounds, while the Hungarian Bishops' Declaration is viewed here as being "in complete contradiction to the teachings of the Catholic Church." The "confession of the Hungarian Non-Violent Basic Communities" as the Bulányi response is titled, was signed by a group of 17 including Father Bulányi, Andrá Gromon, Gyula Simonyi and others whose names have appeared again and again in the controversy over the years. Kiszely's name, interestingly, is not in the list.66
The death of Cardinal Lekai in June 1987 had, of course, touched off speculations about possible changes in the situation when a new primate would be appointed. The Chairman of the State Office for Church Affairs, Imre Miklós, insisted, however, that state church policies were not expected to depart at all from what they had been under Lekai. He hailed the Bishops' Declaration in support of obligatory military service, as "being in the spirit of Vatican II" and "formulated in the interest of national defense."\(^67\)

Two events in 1987 would affect further developments in the debate, but it was still too early to say in what way. On 6 March 1987, the Vatican announced the appointment of new bishops for Hungary. The move included the nomination of Dr. László Paskai as archbishop of Esztergom, which would make him automatically Primate of Hungary's Catholic Church. It was a change that most observers viewed as a way to retain the status quo.\(^68\) Imre Miklós has, in any case, made another of his declarations saying that "state policy towards the churches will remain unchanged."\(^69\)

The other event was the announcement of the Vatican's decision on the Bulánnyi case. It came on June 11, 1987, along with the announcement of the appointment of the new Primate. It was not the hard condemnation that many had expected. Instead it was little more than a call for further clarification of Father Bulánnyi's views, with some (surprising to many) expressions of respect for the priest. As the Holy See puts it,\(^70\)

> The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in sending you this letter, which reflects the decisions which have been made by the whole church and confirmed by the Holy Father, does not forget your suffering which you have had to bear for the gospel of Christ, an in the service of your brothers. For this very reason, it expects a measured reply from you as a servant of the Gospel and a priest of the Catholic Church.

There is then, as 1987 drew to a close, still no marked difference in the postures which have taken shape during the pacifist controversy in Hungary up to that point. Rome, it would appear, was sensitive to the delicate church-state situation which existed in that country. The Holy See seemed unwilling to dismiss out of hand the contribution which the basic communities including that of Father Bulanyi had made so far, nor did it want to give a freer hand to the state and Hungarian hierarchy against "The Bush." This might only encourage harsher steps against other basic communities at the same time.

The new primate, Archbishop László Paskai, as noted, has already identified himself with the policies of the Hungarian government. The October letter from the Bench of Bishops, which he chairs, was widely interpreted in Hungary as an attack on the Bulanyist pacifists, and as a signal
that he would basically continue the Lekai approach ("small steps") on this touchy matter. Father Bulányi himself remains inflexible in his views, and has not mitigated his suspicions of a hierarchy that he feels is still far too subservient to the state.

A breaktrough, unlikely as it might have seemed at the time, would come sooner than expected. Just when the changes began was not entirely clear. It is certain through that the meeting of 14 March 1988 between the new Prime Minister, Karoly Grosz, and Cardinal Paskai, along with the Catholic bishops of Hungary, brought a new dynamic to bear on the situation.

For this meeting the bishops had proposed a discussion of possible changes in state-church relations as far as the Catholic Church was concerned. It appeared that a basically new agreement was envisioned, to replace the one signed under duress in 1950 by Archbishop Grosz.

Besides presenting concerns for greater freedom in areas such as education, religious broadcasting and rehabilitation of religious orders, the bishops and the Cardinal also brought a request asking the government to reconsider its policy of jailing Catholic conscientious objectors to armed service, and to make provision for some kind of unarmed alternative service. Not long before that nearly 250 Hungarians had signed an international East European appeal to include COs in the Helsinki process. It called upon "all signatories of the Helsinki Accord to undertake a mutual obligation to recognize citizens' rights to conscientious objection and alternative service." Whether these events influenced each other is difficult to say.

The meeting itself led immediately to an announcement by the Prime Minister that government authorities were in fact considering a new law which would grant COs what the Cardinal had requested. Not long afterwards government statistics on how many CO prisoners were still found in Hungarian jails—a total of 158, among whom were 146 Jehovah's Witnesses, 6 Catholic and one each from the Nazarenes and Adventists.

The Hungarian Peace Council, meanwhile, had held a forum on 17 March in which a colonel-general from the Ministry of Defense and two champions of the COs—Tibor Holczer, a prominent peace activist, and Tamas Mezel, law student, were participants. At that time the Peace Council president himself, Prof Lászlo Stanyik, had argued that COs should be granted consideration, not only on religious grounds, and that alternative service should not involve any disadvantage when compared to military service.

On May 15 Archbishop Paskai repeated his call for the government to allow Catholics the right of conscientious objection and to provide some form of alternative service for COs. Father Bulanyi had earlier termed the outcome of the 14 March meeting as surpassing our wildest
dreams". He noted that 25 of "our brethren" had been imprisoned "in recent years" for refusing military service. "Always," he added, "the bishops have opposed us, saying that pacifism was incompatible with Catholicism and patriotism."78

In August West Europeans could read the Süddeutsche Zeitung the announcement that from 1989 on young Hungarian men would have the possibility of choosing between active military service and civilian alternative. An appropriate new law was being prepared. Hungarian authorities had commented that the new arrangements should not become a punishment, nor be seen as more attractive than army service.79

It would seem like the COs have achieved their goal. Father Bulanyi and his basic community members are concerned now that alternative service be indeed "civilian" and not done under the auspices of the army. "We are not prepared," they say, "to perform service in an institution whose task it is to kill the enemy." If alternative service were not to be a true civilian service Bulanyists predict that the problems connected with conscientious objection would continue.80

1 "Vatican Decision on Father Bulanyi Published (Hungary)," Keston News Service No. 278, 25 June, 1987, 18.


3 "The Vicissitudes of the Hungarian Catholic Church," RCL vol. 12, No. 2. (Summer, 1984), 215-226 henceforth cited as "Vicissitudes".

4 Ibid.
5 Polgar, op. cit. 24; Laszlo, op. cit., 6.
6 (Karoly Kiszely) "My Time Inside for Saying No to Arms," END Journal of European Nuclear Disarmament, Nos. 16/17 (Summer, 1985), 10.
7 Judy Dempsey, "Hungary's Religious Dissenters Under Attack," BBC Current Affairs Research and Information Section Report, TZ1 1410, 13/01/84.
8 (Miklos Haraszti) "Turning the Other Cheek," RCL Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring, 1983), 97-98, henceforth cited as "The Other Cheek".
9 "Vicissitudes," 217.
11 "The Other Cheek," 100.


13 Ibid, 100


19 "Diskussion um Wehrdienstverweigerung in Ungarn: Kritik an Haltung des Primas", Kathpress/Ausland, December 10, 1981, 6. the signators included Tamás Horváth, György Szekely, György Kocsis, László Varnei, János Redey and József Vincze. The Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Germany was strongly supporting proposals for a civilian alternative service for conscientious objectors during this time. Cf. Theo Mchtenburg, "Die Friedensverantwortung der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR", in Die Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR edited by Reinhard Henkys (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1982), 355-399, on peace initiatives in the Evangelical Church of the GDR.


28 "Top Church Hierarchy", 25.
30 English-language translations of these documents are in the author's files, Courtesy of Amnesty International, London, UK.
35 To-date the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of the Nazarene are the only religious groups who have received official recognition for obtaining military exemptions on behalf of their members. It may be that Seventh Day Adventists are getting that privilege too, but this has not been publicly acknowledged so far. A recent membership tabulation cites the Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses as having just under 5000 members each and the Nazarenes as having about 3400. This may have risen somewhat by now. Cf. O. Luchterhandt and R. Bohren eds. Die Religionsfreiheit in Osteuropa. (Zollikon; G2W Verlag, 1984), 241-242.
36 A copy is in the author's files, courtesy of Amnesty International, in London, UK.
37 "Ungarische Bischofskonferenz befasste sich wieder mit 'Fall Bulanyi'", Kathpress/Ausland, Aug. 2, 1984, 5.
38 "Ungarn: Pater Bulanyi Antwortet auf Anwuerfe des Primas", Kathpress/Ausland May 9, 1984, 4.
43 "Ungarischer Katholik", Kathpress reminded its readers at this point in its communique that what the Pope had in fact said was that he hoped that those Catholic theological students who had joined the military might also receive proper pastoral care.
44 Catholic Conscientious Objectors" East European Reporter Vol. 1, No. 2 (Summer, 1985), 32.
46 "Ungarischer Priester von Suspendierung Bedroht", Kathpress/Ausland, March 13, 1985, 7. Copies of Kocsi's letter of complaint to the prison officials (Jan. 20, 1985), and the one in which these officials had earlier sought to explain why they were restricting access to the imprisoned CO (Dec. 21, 1984), are in the author's file. Courtesy of Amnesty International, London, U.K.
47 "Ungarischer Priester", 7.
Ungarn: katholische Wehrdienstverweigerer Berufen sich auf die Verfassung*, Kathpress/Vatikan/Ausland, June 20, 1985, 3.

Ibid. Kiszely was attempting to have the charges laid against him in 1976 struck off the record, and was hoping the military court would support this appeal to the court for constitutional rights. The military court however rejected his request without written explanations of its action.

This case of Attila Hazi, a Catholic conscientious objector, drew attention for different reasons. In August, 1984, he had received exemption and an assignment to serve with 15 Nazarenes and 2 Jehovah's Witnesses in alternative work. After a month the authorities discovered their "error", and forced him to choose between military service or trial before a court. Hazi claimed exemption on the basis of equality before the law, was then arrested, and sentenced to twelve months in prison, that proces, too, was declared to be secret.

The directives giving exemption were cited as being 06/1977 and 01/14/1977. Ibid.


"Bischofe koennen Wehrdienstverweigerer nicht helfen", Kathpress/Ausland, October 15, 1985, 5.


From excerpts in a German translation in the author's files, courtesy of Kathpress offices in Vienna, Austria.

A dissident open letter, dealing with cultural restrictions was mentioned in "The Cultural Form Gets Off to a Bumpy Start", Radio Free Europe Research Hungarian Situation Report 12, 13-14, but there is no reference to the issue raised by Kiszely.


"Hungarian Catholics", 98-99


"Hungarian Catholics," 98-100.

"Miklos on Church-State Relations (Hungary)," KNS, No. 269, 19 February, 1987, 16.

69 "Miklos Speakson Church-State Relations (Hungary)," *KNS*, No. 274, 30 April, 1987, 17. It may be noted that several other important leadership changes were also taking place in Hungary. The Lutheran bishop, Tibor Bartha had retired and the Luteran bishop Zoltan Kaldy had recently died as well. Cf. also "Miklos Cautions Against Changes in Church-State Relations (Hungary)," *KNS*, No. 277, 11 June, 1987, 20.


72 "Catholic Bishops Request Major Changes in Church-State Relations (Hungary)," *KNS*, No. 299 (29 April 1988), 4. Cf also "Cardinal Paskai Calls for Reform of Church State Relations (Hungary),* *KNS*, No. 302 (9 June 1988, 13. Paskai, who succeeded Laszlo Lekai as Archbishop of Esztergom, was one of twenty-five new Cardinals named by Pope John Paul II on 29 May.

73 "East European CO Declaration," *WR Newsletter*, No. 220 (Apr/May) 1988, 12. The other signatories included 60 from Czechoslovakia, 36 from Yugoslavia, 21 from Poland, 15 from the GDR, and 77 from the Soviet Union.


75 "154 Religious Conscientious Objectors to Military Service in Gaol (Hungary)," *KNS*, No. 299 (28 April, 1988), 17.


78 "Bulanyi Foresees a New Phase of Church State Relations (Hungary)," *KNS* No. 300 (31 March 1988), 11.

79 "Alternativ Service for Hungarian COs," *Transatlantic Peace Newsletter* Issue 1, September, 1988, 6. Cf also "Grosz Makes Concessions to the Church (Hungary)," *KNS* No. 310 (6 October 1988), 8-9

80 "Bulanyists Oppose Unarmed Military Service (Hungary)," *KNS* No. 312 (3 November 1988), 14.