

# AIRGRAM

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TO : Department of State

Info: Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, Sao Paulo

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BUREAU OF INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS  
Aug 31 1 41 PM 1967  
SEP 5 1967  
BR/BS

FROM : Amconsul PORTO ALEGRE

RS/AN  
ANALYSIS BRANCH  
DATE: August 26, 1967

SUBJECT : Porto Alegre Bishop Becomes Rightist Spokesman

REF :

1. During the first week of August numerous leaflets and wall paintings appeared in Porto Alegre saying "The Church is finished with Communist priests and Communism is finished with the Church". The leaflets and paintings were signed Movimento de Recuperacao da Igreja. At the end of the week the Bishop of Porto Alegre, Dom Vicente Scherer, made an unusual radio address in which he denounced the clergy of Sao Paulo for assisting the clandestine UNE Congress in late July. Scherer said that priests did not have the right to use the position and prestige conferred upon them by the Church to promote personal ideas. He went on to say that priests who insist on ignoring the historic separation of Church and State and becoming involved in partisan politics must take the consequences like any other citizen. At the end of his speech the Bishop admitted he is a conservative and is proud of it.

2. Some 18 Sao Paulo priests and bishops replied to Dom Vicente Scherer in an open letter dated August 10 in which they said they were surprised and hurt by his criticism and, in effect, that he didn't know what he was talking about. The letter said that the Sao Paulo clergy wanted in the exercise of their ministry to carry the word of God to human realities, showing solidarity with the unjustly oppressed poor by deeds as well as words. In a personal slap at the Porto Alegre prelate, the letter said that "when you take cognizance of the reality of your people and wish, in the face of this reality, to proclaim the demands of your evangelical mission you will be subject to the same reprisals that we have been".

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3. Dom Vicente replied to the letter of the Paulista priests on August 14 saying that their argument was irrelevant to the case since the UNE meeting had nothing to do with the problems of the oppressed poor. He said that the UNE is an illegal organization representing a minority of even the students, much less the people.

4. In actions that were themselves notable exceptions to the separation of Church and State, Dom Vicente received public support from both the executive and legislative branches of the government of Rio Grande do Sul. In an unusual action Governor Walter Perrachi Barcellos together with his right hand man and Chief of the Civil Household, Dr. João Dentice, visited the Bishop and congratulated him on his stand. The ARENA floor leader in the Legislative Assembly, Ari Delgado, also made a speech supporting the Bishop.

Comment:

5. Although Dom Vicente's conservative views are well known, he is a mild-mannered and unassertive man whose sudden emergence as a spokesman for the conservative wing of the clergy at the national level was something of a surprise. It is possible that the Bishop was pressured into taking action. Reliable information indicates that the leaflet and wall painting campaign that preceded Dom Vicente's first statement was actually directed and financed by the Secretariat of Security on the orders of Colonel Walter Almeida, Chief of Cabinet of the Secretariat. The Bishop may have been subjected to other, more subtle pressures as well. Both Almeida and his boss, General Iba Mesquita Ilha Moreira, have been praised for their effective and on the whole moderate handling of the student problem in Rio Grande do Sul, but both are strong anti-Communists who believe in carrying the fight into the enemy camp whenever possible.

6. It is also probable that Dom Vicente Scherer is becoming concerned about the small but growing liberal movement among priests in his own diocese and chose this means to issue a warning without becoming explicit.

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