

Ex-Red Agent Takes Stand In Trial

'Every Priest Is Agent'

By DON MILLER

The drama and mystery of an international spy novel touched briefly today on the hearing of a Lorain priest, fighting against his ouster from the pulpit.

From the lips of a one-time Russian secret service major came charges of Communist infiltration of the church to which the Lorainite now claims allegiance.

Called to the witness stand in a surprise move was Peter Deriabina, one-time member of the Komosol (youth section) of the Communist Party, the party itself, and of the Russian intelligence apparatus.

He was summoned by the plaintiff in a hearing which is to determine whether or not a temporary injunction against the Rev. George Burdickoff will become permanent.

Fr. Burdickoff is the suspended pastor of the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of SS. Peter and Paul, Lorain.

Priest's Position

The priest has testified that even though the American branch of the church claims allegiance to its leader, Metropolitan Leonty, the proper allegiance is to the Patriarch of the church in Moscow.

But, declared today's surprise witness, a former major in the Soviet secret service, every priest in the Russian Orthodox Church headed by the Patriarch, and even the second-ranking official in that church, is a Communist Party agent.

Deriabina's testimony was given in the form of proffers — a legal term showing that his testimony

is objected to by one of the litigants, but is included in the record as "what we would have said had he been permitted to answer."

Question Dropped

Deriabina told the court that he served with the Soviet state security office from April, 1944 to February, 1954. He refused to tell how he happened to come to this country, and that particular issue was dropped like a hot potato after a brief conference with Common Pleas Judge W. W. Badger, hearing the case.

Deriabina declared that various agencies of the Soviet secret police were designated by letters of the alphabet. Section "O", he said, was the secret unit responsible for religious matters inside the Soviet Union.

Allied with it, but publicized, is the Council of Russian Orthodox Affairs, another government office.

Deriabina said Section "O" had agents in every province, district and village in the Soviet Union.

Part of its work, he testified, is to recruit theological students as Communist agents. Every priest, he said, is an agent of the secret police. Even the second ranking official in the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow is an agent, Deriabina declared.

Priest Was Agent

He said he met this particular church official at the Vienna Airport in 1954, in response to a telegram sent to him by the chief of Russian intelligence. The telegram, Deriabina said, specifically named the church official as an agent of the secret police.

The church official, Deriabina said, was in Vienna to attend a peace conference and he (Deriabina) had been advised he could "use" him as he wished.

He also told of encountering a secret service agent with whom he once was familiar, and discovered this agent in the robes of a priest. "Work is work," the agent-priest said, according to Deriabina.

Defense Atty. John Vintilla, Cleveland, fought heatedly to bar Deriabina's testimony, and was sustained by Judge Badger.

"To impute criminality to the defendant — it's just unheard of," Vintilla declared.

Judge Badger ruled that Deriabina's testimony could be heard only as it affected credibility of other witnesses in the case.

Charged With Misconduct

Father Burdickoff has been charged by church officials with misconduct. So far in the trial, this "misconduct" has only been hinted at.

Yesterday questions put to him by Atty. Basil Dziamas hinted at two New York vacations in which the priest took "a person" with him. The person was not identified, but Dziamas, by his questions, indicated the person was a woman.

It's apparent, too, that church funds are entering the picture. In conference with Judge Badger this morning, Atty. Ralph Armstrong Arkush, one of the plaintiff attorneys, told the judge he wished to call as a witness a church official.

He is to testify concerning church money, Arkush said, adding, "There was \$23,000 in the balance on the report, and we want to see what became of that \$23,000." The report was one of the documents introduced by the plaintiffs.

In turn, Fr. Burdickoff claims he's the victim of a conspiracy and of "intrusion from the outside."

"Some Jealous"

"Certain people," he said yesterday, "are jealous of progress in the parish. They're trying to divide the church and its members, and scatter the riches of the parish."

But Atty. Arkush viewed the "riches of the parish" in a different light.

Referring to the Moscow branch of the church and to its Communist agents garbed as priests, Arkush told Judge Badger, "The property of this parish should not be under control of this hierarchy which is only a part of the Russian intelligence service."

Judge Badger, referring to the general line of questioning of Deriabina, said, "It might be competent in a Senate investigation, or in Kennedy's committee, but in this particular case the court feels it is not proper in the proceedings."

Deriabina U. S. Citizen

Deriabina now is a naturalized

American, and is a graduate student at the University of Virginia. Because many facts surrounding him involved national security — and his own security — the defecting Russian was not put under too close a scrutiny on cross-examination.

Another witness this morning was Natalie Yavornitzke, 3127 Grove Ave., Lorain, who testified that Fr. Burdickoff, in answer to her questions as to why the church placed allegiance with Metropolitan Leonty rather than the Patriarch in Moscow, told her of Communist domination of the Moscow branch.

She said she at one time was an ardent supporter of the embattled priest, but after she learned he'd aligned himself with the Moscow branch she changed.

Yesterday's afternoon session virtually all revolved around attempts by Dziamas to show that Rev. Burdickoff made three switches in church allegiance. The changes, Dziamas contended, ended up with Rev. Burdickoff receiving in June, 1960 a pastor appointment from the Patriarch.

This would make Rev. Burdickoff a member of the Moscow branch of the church, an association denied by the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America, which recognizes Metropolitan Leonty as its governing head.

The Lorain priest, in a highly involved and rambling answer, admitted yesterday that he'd received his Lorain appointment through Metropolitan Leonty's council and the Lorain parish.

He hadn't informed parish members of this switch, however, Rev. Burdickoff said for "that was not necessary in our case."

Although the Patriarchal appointment came in June, he'd attended a meeting of the Ohio Deanery, under the American branch of the church, as a delegate in September, 1960, Rev. Burdickoff admitted. But, he insisted, he attended as "a Russian Orthodox priest."

"You're quite evasive, aren't you?" Dziamas snapped.

Asked by Judge Badger if he'd been a deanery member in good standing, entitled to vote at the September meeting held at Marblehead, Rev. Burdickoff went into another lengthy, rambling answer.

"By determination of church law I had the right," he eventually said. "Under Metropolitan Leonty or others I did not have that right."

The priest contended several times yesterday, again in answers so lengthy and involved that even