

538

Vienna, August 6, 1935.

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Information*

Dear Dunn:

Perhaps you have not had the time to read yourself my recent despatches on the difficulties of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. A dissolution order has been issued against the Austrian branch of the Society by the Austrian Government, and, although the Society has appealed against this decision, I feel pretty sure, under the circumstances, that the Government will proceed with the dissolution. There is not a single American in Austria connected with the Society, and Harbeck, who, as you know, is an American, comes here from time to time from Switzerland in its behalf.

When he was here last, as will be noted from my more recent despatches, I told him that there was nothing further the Legation could do under the circumstances until it had received instructions from the Department. He assumed a very belligerent attitude. From here he went to Berlin, and according to the papers he was arrested there for attempting to smuggle out of Germany monies belonging to the Society, but was later released and deported. I have no official information about this from Berlin, but there were reports to this effect in the Paris edition of the Herald.

According to the Austrian papers, the Watch Tower is in difficulties in South Africa, where it is accused of inciting religious fanaticism among the negroes.

The Watch Tower is an old story in the Department and its files from Berlin and Vienna tell their own story. While I was home Chandler Anderson, who is the

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Counsel for the Society in Washington, and its Washington representative, whose name I forget, wished to see me, and we lunched at the Club. I told them frankly what the Society here was, and said that I was confident that they would have trouble continuously here in Austria on account of the nature of their pamphlets and particularly because of the fanaticism of Harbeck. I told them very frankly that our experience with Harbeck in Berlin and Vienna had convinced not only me, but the other officers who had to do with the matter, that Harbeck was an ignorant fanatic, who would not stop at anything, and that he was bound to get the Society in trouble even if the authorities did not object to the pamphlets and activities of the Society otherwise. Anderson and the Washington representative of the Society expressed appreciation of my frankness and, while they did not say so, I think they quite realized that my description of Harbeck was a fitting one. They said that they would take up the situation with him.

Since I was home Harbeck has been in the United States, but if anything was said to him there by his superiors, it has had no effect on his activities here. The Austrian authorities lost patience with the Society after it had promised not to circulate certain publications in Austria and later found that these were again being circulated merely under a change of name. When I took this up with Harbeck, he tried to avoid the issue, but Kennan and I were both convinced that he knew all about this irregular practice. The long and short of it is that Harbeck is a fanatic who believes that any means is justified in the struggle which he feels called upon to carry on against the Catholic Church and, incidentally here in Austria, against the Government, because he considers it dominated by that Church. I have tried most patiently for several years, in Berlin and here, to make Harbeck see the difference between religious activity which our Government can foster and the sort of aggressive, militant attitude which he personally takes and which also appears in some of the Society's pamphlets which I have read. All this has been without avail.

- 3 -

I told Anderson and the Washington representative of the Society that I felt sure that the Society would have trouble, not only in Germany and Austria, but increasingly so in other countries, and this seems to be indicated by the reports from South Africa. The Society has, I think, quite a number of adherents at home and some prominent supporters. I think whatever connection there may be in Washington with the Department is through Judge Rutherford, who seems to be its head. I do not know enough of the American organization to have any opinion concerning it, but I am writing to tell you that its representatives with whom I have had contact in Berlin and Vienna are a slippery crowd. I think they are well-meaning people, but here in Austria their work is directed towards stirring up the peasants against the Church and against the Government. I think that the Society will become increasingly a matter of concern to the Department, for it will undoubtedly continue to call upon it for support abroad. I need not tell you that I am without any religious prejudice, but it is obvious that we cannot support such an organization abroad almost completely in the hands of foreigners and the activities of which tend to disturb conditions already sufficiently troubled.

So far as the situation here is concerned, I am refraining from doing anything with regard to the dissolution order. I have told the Department that the circumstances are such that I can do nothing further in the absence of specific instructions. In view of the circumstances, I doubt whether if we make further representations they would have any success, and in view of what I believe are the established activities of the Society here I am definitely of the opinion that we should make no further representations on their behalf. I will, of course, be guided, however, by any instructions I may receive.

I just want to give you this background, as it may be of some use. Geist in Berlin knows more about the activities of the Society than any of us abroad, and I am sure that his personal estimate of Harbeck agrees with mine.

With all good wishes,

Cordially yours,