

CIA

Church Council Studies Demand For Ouster on Nazi Crime Charge

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Heads of churches that belong to the National Council of Churches met in emergency session yesterday to consider demands that a council board member be dismissed because of charges that he is a Nazi war criminal.

"No major results" were reported from the two-hour meeting of 11 of the 31 denominational heads and an atmosphere of growing tension. But there were signs that the dispute was narrowing somewhat to an attempt to resolve difference between protesting Jewish groups and the Orthodox Church in America, the denomination represented by the controversial board member.

The conflict centers on Archbishop Valerian Trifa of the Rumanian Orthodox Episcopate, a member of the Orthodox Church in America. The Archbishop has been accused of war crimes by various groups and individuals and denaturalization proceedings are under study by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The church has thus far fully backed the Archbishop. But during yesterday's meeting, representatives of the church told the denominational heads that the case would be reviewed at the church's Holy Synod next week. Steps were also being taken to arrange a meeting between the church's leaders and Jewish leaders.

No Church Investigation

The church conceded that it had not investigated the charges but had relied on the confidence placed in the prelate by the Rumanian branch of the church.

Members of Concerned Jewish youth were scheduled to meet with the council staff today to discuss the issue.

"We can't stand by and allow an anti-Semite to gain credibility by sitting on that board," said Gerald Strober, a consultant to one Jewish group. "We will do everything possible to change this."

The controversy began when 30 members of Concerned Jewish Youth disrupted a meeting of the council's governing board on Oct. 8 at the Roosevelt Hotel. The group labeled the Archbishop a "murderer" and demanded his ouster.

Two days later the council's credentials committee ruled that it had no power to remove the Archbishop, and Jewish leaders reacted with expressions of shock and dismay.

Sit-in at Council Offices

The protest group responded by occupying the council's offices at 475 Riverside Drive last Thursday. They left the building only after assurances that the matter would be brought up at the staff meeting.

The controversy involves a tangle of volatile issues and relationships among religious groups.

Though some council members have argued for the need to remove the Archbishop on moral grounds, others have cautioned against the possibility of interfering with the prelate's right of due process.

Jews have confronted the council with a serious challenge that could further weaken the ecumenical body. Any hint of harboring a suspected Nazi war criminal could badly damage the body's reputation.

What has complicated the present picture is the difficulty of reaching an agree-

ment between the Orthodox Church in America and the whole council.

The Orthodox Church in America, one of eight Orthodox denominations that belong to the council, includes the Rumanian Orthodox Episcopate. It consists of one million Christians, most with ethnic roots in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe.

The church has stoutly supported the Archbishop. An official statement from the church's Lesser Synod on April 3, 1975, declared that the Archbishop had the "respect as well as the loyalty" of his fellow bishops and of "his flock."

The statement continued, "He has carried out his pastoral responsibilities zealously and has maintained his pastoral image without blemish."

Due Process Stressed

Claire Randall, general secretary of the council, included the statement in a mailing to the governing board on Oct. 12, following the outbreak of the dispute.

In a covering letter, she also said that for members of the church, "many of whom or whose ancestors are from Russia and eastern European countries," the question of the Archbishop's rights to due process are of "greater importance" than they might be "for others."

The council constitution contains no provision for removing a board member. Each denomination has held the right to choose its own representatives. Denominational autonomy, in fact, has been a key feature of the organization.

But those inside and outside the council, including the protesting Jewish group, view the situation as a moral question that transcends the letter of the constitution.