

Cardinal Mindszenty is released, leaves Hungary

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty became a free man Tuesday. During the last 23 years he was free for only four days, in October 1956, when Hungarians revolted against Communist rule.

Release of the cardinal may represent the final dramatic milestone in Mindszenty's life. Whatever the Vatican's plans might be, it is unlikely that the 79-year-old man ever will play a major role again, either in his country or elsewhere.

This reporter was perhaps the only Western newsman who covered the four major postwar phases of Mindszenty's life: he interviewed him while he was still residing in his magnificent palace in Esztergom, then reported his sensational trial, saw him again when a platoon of soldiers who joined the revolution freed and brought him back to Budapest, and finally talked to him in the shelter of the U.S. legation where Mindszenty sought and found refuge when the Soviets besieged the city to crush the revolt.

He always was the same man, the proud, rigid, almost stubborn prince of the Roman Catholic Church.

Hungarians, Catholics and others, more or less agreed right from the beginning that Mindszenty, spiritual leader of about seven million Hungarian Catholics, was not up to his task during the dangerous period of the late 1940's when the Communists applied crude terror to take over their country. The man, elevated by the Holy See to his high post during the chaotic period of the war, remained a parochial priest in the Esztergom palace, where Hungary's primates had resided for centuries.

Hungary's religious leaders, first of all the Catholics, tradi-

tionally played important roles in the country's political life. In this climatic period, when the non-Communists were on the defensive against the ruthless tactics of the Red army-supported Communists, what Hungary needed was a skilled political priest in the primate's palace. Mindszenty was not this kind of a man.

Then Gabor Peter, dreaded head of the Hungarian secret police, personally arrested him the day

after Christmas and an indictment accused him of high treason.

The cardinal was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

"I was tortured in body and soul," Mindszenty said on the afternoon of Oct. 30, 1956, when a jubilant crowd escorted him back to the small medieval palace of primates in Budapest.

The eight years in prison did not show on the cardinal. His piercing eyes, slightly stooped

posture were the same—but there was a trace of greater understanding, almost mellowness in the man, standing in the small study of his Budapest residence.

Three days later, on Nov. 3, he addressed his countrymen in a radio message. His speech, contrary to Communist accusations, was modest, almost humble.

A few hours later, at dawn Nov. 4, he found asylum in the U.S. legation: the air then was

ringing with the fire of Russian tanks.

At mid-morning the same day rumor reached the legation that the Soviets had threatened to bomb the city from the air if the revolutionaries did not capitulate. The legation ordered everyone to the cellar. This reporter sat alone with Mindszenty in a corner.

He was calm, quiet, and very

sad. He talked in low tones, recalled his earlier meetings with this writer. The atmosphere encouraged the latter to ask the indiscreet question: "Why are you here?"

Cardinal Mindszenty pondered and sighed: "Somebody must remain alive and free to tell the world what has happened, to shake up the conscience of the peoples."

Now, at long last, the cardinal is a free man again.

What induced him to do so, one can only guess. Probably to report from Rome that he looked healthy on arrival, it is known that as long as he remained in the embassy, the Vatican could not appoint another head of Hungary's Catholic Church.

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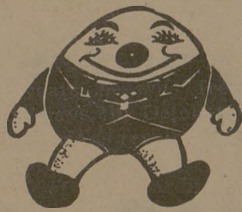
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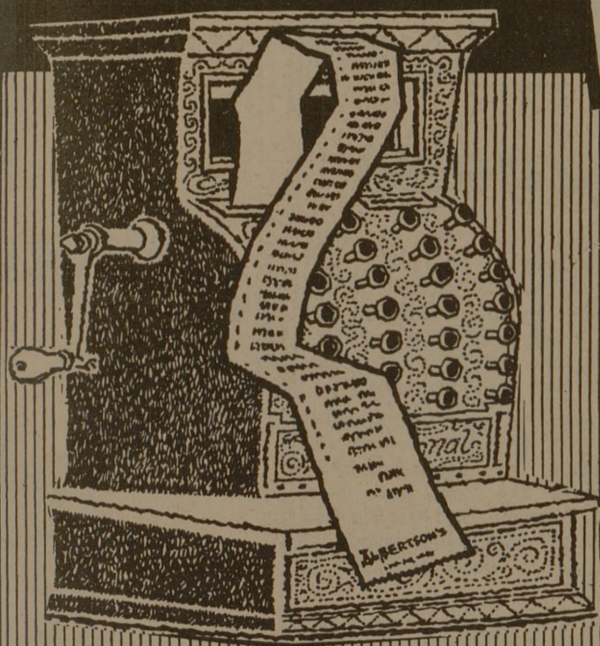
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