

and no property in Bulányi's scheme of things, it is difficult to see how any theologians could be educated except at the expense of the state — a practical problem which he does not address. He appears to reject infant baptism (a long-standing tradition within Roman Catholicism), yet this practice, it seems to me, is one of the chief means by which the church overcomes the distinction between the natural, familial community, and the sacramental community within the parish.

There is much else in "Church Order" with which I could take issue. But they would be, as in the paragraph above, matters of detail. The fundamental problem, I would suggest, is that Fr Bulányi's vision as outlined in this document of about ninety pages is more Congregationalist than Roman Catholic. It is little wonder that his teaching worries Roman, as well as Hungarian, authorities.

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## Most Favoured Nation?

During 1986 a Romanian serving a five-year sentence for violent assault on a policeman, and another Romanian serving a 14-year sentence for large-scale embezzlement from his place of work were released from gaol, having served only a fraction of their sentences. Their release had more to do with decisions taken — or about to be taken — by the US government than with the policies of their own legal or governmental authorities. A blatant case of "interference" by one country in the affairs of another?

The Americans would readily admit it — though "influence" is the term they would be more inclined to use. The two prisoners in question were Constantin Sfatcu and Dorel Cataramă, at that time Romania's most prominent religious prisoners. There was little doubt that they had been arrested not for the alleged offences with which they were charged and on which they were convicted but, in reality, for "disapproved of" religious activities. Other human rights cases "resolved" at about the same time included that of Radu Filipescu, the young en-

gineer sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for distributing leaflets calling for a public demonstration against President Ceausescu, and that of Gheorghe Brasoveanu, one of the two founders of Romania's short-lived free trade union.

All this happened in the three months leading up to the renewal, by the USA, of Romania's "Most Favoured Nation" status. "Most Favoured Nation" (MFN) is a valuable — and in Romania's case, much needed — tariff concession. Romania received it in 1975, the year after the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act defined the terms under which the Congress was permitted to grant the concession to "communist countries without free emigration". The Jackson-Vanik amendment determined that MFN can be granted to such countries only if it is held that such action would serve to promote freer emigration. In practice, other human rights considerations — besides freedom of emigration — have always been taken into account when deciding whether MFN is to be awarded. Thus the imposition of martial law in 1981 caused Poland to

lose MFN. MFN status is subject to annual review, and renewal is not automatic.

There was considerable opposition to renewal of MFN for Romania both in 1985 and 1986. The House of Representatives vote, on 29 July, by the narrow margin of 216 to 190, gives some indication of the strength of that opposition last year — though it should be added that, since President Reagan had already announced (on 3 June) that MFN would continue, it would have required a vote of *both* houses of Congress to overturn the President's decision.

Religious groups were prominent among those lobbying for a withdrawal or suspension of MFN. These included Christian Response International and the Wheaton-based Romanian Missionary Society, headed by exiled Baptist Pastor Joseph Ton. Not surprisingly, then, religious freedom featured prominently in the debate. The issues raised included church demolitions, approval and appointment of clergy, and provision of Christian literature, as well as individual cases such as those of Sfatcu and Cataramă.

Romania is currently one of only two Warsaw Pact states to enjoy MFN status (the other is Hungary). To the opponents of MFN it seemed curious, if not absurd, that a privilege whose award is conditional, supposedly, upon a good human rights record should be extended to a country whose performance in this field is in fact one of the worst in the Soviet bloc. Furthermore, it was claimed, Romania was cynically manipulating the whole MFN process by careful timing of arrests and releases: shortly after the renewal of MFN each summer the authorities could get on with arresting whomever they liked; and then, in the late spring or early summer of the following year, they would produce "concessions" in the shape of the

release of a handful of prominent dissidents; satisfied with this "evidence" of progress in the right direction, the US would renew MFN, and the cycle would begin all over again. Even if a few prominent individuals do gain release from prison, and even if a somewhat larger number are enabled to leave the country, the vast majority still have to live in wretched conditions under a corrupt and unjust regime, a regime which is bolstered by the granting of MFN. What credit is there in releasing a handful of people who did not deserve to be arrested in the first place? The MFN process, it is argued, might even *encourage* the regime to make a few extra arrests, so that it can use the victims as bargaining counters later on.

There is no evidence that Romania has ever gone so far as to arrest anyone specially for the purpose of releasing them when it needs to gain the approval of the USA. But the evidence of the past five years or more does suggest that the MFN opponents are right in observing that the human rights concessions won as a result of MFN pressure have been little more than superficial and short-term, while Romanian human rights behaviour in general remains fundamentally unchanged.

Yet MFN was renewed again in 1986. The American administration had concluded that, on balance, there was more to be gained by renewal than by suspension. President Reagan was therefore advised to announce the continuation of MFN. There were several reasons.

The Jackson-Vanik amendment was concerned first and foremost with the right to emigrate. Important though other areas of human rights may be, it is the influence that MFN has on the freedom of emigration which, according to the law, has to be the primary criterion for judgement. Here the Americans were

presented with a strong case for renewal.

In the first place, the crude figures are impressive: it was reported last summer that more than 154,000 Romanian citizens had been allowed to leave the country since the introduction of MFN in 1975. Closer examination of the figures reveals, however, that more than eighty per cent of them went either to West Germany or to Israel (and most of the rest, some 25,000, to the USA). The vast majority of emigrants to West Germany and Israel are, respectively, ethnic Germans or Jews; both West Germany and Israel pay the Romanian state a substantial sum in hard currency for each emigrant. So, in expediting the emigration of these two groups, both of which have declined very significantly in the past two decades, Romania is at the same time earning badly-needed foreign exchange and shifting the balance of its population in favour of ethnic Romanians and against its ethnic minorities. Against this background, the crude emigration figures look less impressive.

The second achievement of MFN in the field of emigration needs no qualification. US pressure resulted, in 1985, in the change of Romanian emigration procedures which had caused thousands of would-be emigrants who were awaiting US visas to be deprived of the right to employment, social services, and rationed foods. Another achievement of American pressure was the non-implementation of a new law which would have obliged emigrants to repay the cost of their education, in hard currency (which Romanians are not normally permitted to possess) — a very considerable impediment to emigration.

Other arguments advanced by the "pro-MFN" camp — coming mainly from those outside the US administration — focus on the likely effect

of depriving Romania of MFN. If MFN were taken away, it is argued, America's only means of exerting influence for good would be lost. True, the gains — outside the field of emigration — had been limited, but they were better than nothing; and if Romania no longer had any incentive to moderate its behaviour towards those citizens of whose activities it disapproved, there might be a further serious deterioration in human rights standards. Also, the withdrawal of MFN would be a serious blow to an already disastrously weak economy — and the ordinary, innocent Romanian would be the first to suffer in any further economic collapse.

America's capacity to exert influence, both economic and military, in many parts of the world, is considerable. Whether that power is always exercised prudently or justly is, to say the least, open to dispute. In the case of Romania and MFN, the arguments are complex and finely balanced, and important among them are considerations of America's own national interest — which we have not even touched upon in this necessarily simplified analysis. In this particular case the debate within the American administration has, it seems, been serious and responsible, and it is certain to continue as the time of the 1987 review draws closer.

Even if Romania is something of a maverick within the Warsaw Pact group, there is no doubt which of the two great powers holds the country within its "sphere of influence", and it is obvious that anyone who follows the affairs of Romania — as with those of any other Eastern European country — needs to keep a close watch on the signs which emerge from the Kremlin. But we should also cast an occasional glance in the direction of the White House.