



Redeemers – poppy harvest, Slovenská Ľupča



The Ursuline Monastery in Modra was the last to be liquidated (25 September 1952)

The Sister told me: "The security forces have closed our monastery." My heart sank, but soon I boarded the bus with a calm soul. I turn around and see the children that I had taught. Then I could forget about what lay ahead and started smiling.

Ursuline Sister Mercedes Hrdličková

They read us an official notification that said: "since you do not want to participate in the youth's socialist teaching and education, you must leave the monastery." 140 people were crammed into a hospice in Dolné Semerovce that had been built to house 20. The village had no electricity. The sisters worked in fields, or mended clothes around a table with just one kerosene lamp.

Ursuline Sister Kamila Horná

The Action R political plan instructed those involved how to justify this unprecedented, illegal, and inhuman step against nuns – who had dedicated their lives to the service of God and neighbours in education, culture, health care, and social needs.

Ján M. Dubovský, historian



NUNS' HEALTH CARE WORK ENDS

That 1,650 nuns (70% of the total number in Slovakia) continued to work in health and social services in Slovakia. By 1957 a total of 1,118 Slovak nuns had been removed from health care.

The regime also criminalised nuns: with a total of 312 years sentenced to be served in communist prisons, mostly for the crime of refusing to work on Sundays or state holidays, or for helping priests. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia had planned for religious orders to have been totally liquidated by the year 2000, yet the nuns kept their pledge: always keep faith.

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ACTION R

The Czechoslovak Republic's communist regime considered religious orders its enemy. As the regime had failed to break the church, it also acted against women's orders as part of liquidation measures. In Operation R (i.e. the abbreviation of the Slovak word for nuns – rehoľníčky), and in subsequent Operations R1 – R7 from August 1950 to 1952, the communists enforced the abolition of over 190 monasteries, with over 2,000 sisters confined to concentration monasteries. Of which, over half were sentenced to forced labour between 1951 and 1952. They also expelled the majority of nuns from the Slovak health care system and social services, and deported two thirds to the Czech Republic. Monastery buildings were confiscated by the regime, and many nuns were imprisoned.

Operation R2 – 460 nuns from six centralised monasteries were relocated and monasteries liquidated.

The nuns were mostly put to work in the Czech textile industry along the Czech/Slovak border or on stateheld property. With 12 to 16 hour shifts commonplace, the nuns' health was badly impacted.

As part of Operation R3, nuns were moved within Slovakia: older ones were concentrated in charity houses located in Modra and Ivánka pri Nitre. On 27 November 1951, Operation R4 continued the intimidation by transporting a further 95 nuns (up to 45 years of age) to the Czech Republic for work. At that time, more than 880 Slovak nuns were relocated to the Czech Republic for various duties. Operations R6 and R7 in 1952 liquidated the last two monasteries.

According to SlovÚC statistics, of the 1,720 concentrated nuns 884 nurses were deported to the Czech Republic for work, 59 left the nunnery, 10 died, and 767 were placed in charitable homes.

The regime excluded religious orders from the associations listed under Act no. 68/1951 Coll. in order to legalize their liquidation, with property, buildings, libraries, and archives appropriated by the state. In practical terms, this process often descended into looting and destruction. Hundreds of educated and spiritually noble nuns worked in the arduous conditions of the Czech textile industry or on agricultural land in Slovakia. Nuns from different orders were deliberately mixed during transfers.

1950



Provincial House of the Congregation of the Daughters of God's Love



School Sisters – heading for the fields, Kláštor pod Znievom



Cross farmstead Havkáč near Budmerice

1960



Ursuline Sister Alfréda at a textile machine near the Czech border

1960s



Vincentians on state land in Slovenská Ľupča

1960s



Cross Institute of Social Care, Ľubovnianske kúpele, prior to Action R

After the Communist Party's 1946 election victory in the Czechoslovak Republic, communist ideologues' plans to limit religious activities came especially into effect following the communist coup d'état in 1948.

In spring 1949, the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs (SlovÚC) had registered 24 women's convents and congregations in Slovakia, which owned 209 monasteries (including houses and flats) where 4,716 nuns resided. Such nuns comprised: 1,071 Vincentians, 682 Cross Sisters, and 603 Redeemers. SlovÚC was tasked with controlling the church and curtailing its activities.

From 1949, the communist regime prepared for the liquidation and confiscation of monasteries as well as the property of monks and nuns. By abusing Slovak National Council regulation no. 80/1945, 11 dormitories for young nuns were nationalized or abolished. Gustáv Husák was the commissioner-chairman of SlovÚC at that time. It was an anti-church measure, which, so to speak, initiated the liquidation of monasteries. In 1950, 76.16% of the Slovak population was religious.

ACTION NUNS

In the early summer of 1950, 340 nuns-teachers were dismissed because Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) leaders claimed that such persons had an anti-state influence on students. By the height of summer, the regime had nationalized the kindergartens from which the nuns had been expelled.

The Communist Party, State Security, and the SlovÚC planned Operation R – the abolition of women's religious orders and the confiscation of their monastic buildings – in order to negate nuns' influence in health care and social services. At that time, more than 1,650 nuns worked in hospitals, social care homes, and medical institutions. Operation R was scheduled for 29 to 31 August 1950. Rudolf Slánský, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, also called for the liquidation of women's monasteries and religious communities.

Hundreds of believers openly protested in several places – verbally attacking KSS and SlovÚC officials, obstructing official cars by lying on roads, and forming mobs. The National Security Corps used weapons and many protesters were arrested. The memories of numerous nuns and the chronicles of religious orders act as testimony to this barbaric tragedy for nuns, hospital patients, children in care homes, the elderly and sick, and the country's spiritual health as a whole.

2,006 nuns were taken to 17 centralised monasteries. More than 190 monasteries were vacated, with buildings as well as contents confiscated and distributed among state institutions, the army, the mining and forestry sectors, and schools.

1,650 nurses including 1,400 medical staff remained working in hospitals, since the regime could not replace them. Yet nurses were removed from social institutions for fear of "subversive activity".

The regime tore the bond between religious orders and believers. They were sent home, but secretly returned to perform the novitiate. Although the regime pressurised nuns to leave their religious orders, only 69 did so. Another commissioner for ecclesiastical affairs, Ladislav Holdoš, recorded 198 confiscated monasteries. The Central Committee of the KSS decided how such buildings would be allocated, and confiscated works of art as well as religious libraries and archives.

ACTION R1 – R7

In January 1951 centralized centres and charity houses in Slovakia had 1,765 nuns under the "non-working" regime, which the communist regime planned to relocate for work to the Czech Republic. The first 400 nuns were moved in September 1951 and accommodated – for example – at dormitories. On 2 October, the SlovÚC prepared a Proposal for the relocation of younger and able-bodied nuns to the Czech Republic and the liquidation of some concentration monasteries in Slovakia – Operation R1, which targeted 30-45-year-old sisters. The plan was to abolish seven centralization monasteries and relocate 966 nuns, with 365 placed into four charity homes. Actually, under Operation R1 on 12 October 1951 330 nuns up to 45 years old were relocated by night from four centralised monasteries, which were then confiscated by the state. Then on the night of 21 October 1951, SlovÚC continued the deportation of nuns to Bohemia through