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16 October 1979

East Europe Report

POLITICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

(FOUO 7/79)



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EAST EUROPE REPORT
POLITICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE JOHN-PAUL II ANALYZED

Paris COMMENTAIRE in French Summer 79 pp 250-254

[Article by Jean Laloy]

[Text] The encyclical letter of John-Paul II has been well received. Many simply have confidence in a man who, with his first words spoken in St. Peter Square the night of his election, greatly moved the throngs. His words--and in any event his intentions--meet with approval. But, precisely what has he said?

Those who have read it* are divided into at least two camps. One rejoices at its teachings on social justice and the rights of man. The other attaches greater worth to the statements, if not the admonitions, on the subjects of doctrine and morality. What is important is the connection between the two--the knot. The encyclical tends to take in both extremes completely and define their relationship.

The letter is encyclical, not only with respect to its audience, but in its composition. Starting with the reforms effected since the [Ecumenical] Council, it delves into the mystery of man fashioned by God, reverts to man in the present-day world, and concludes with the church, the community of friends of God, whose presence extends beyond its visible limits.

When this text, concise in style and at times difficult, is considered in the wake of speeches and utterances which had been heard for 6 months, it can be believed that the pope is seeking to answer the questions constantly directed at him--what have you to tell us? What have you to say that we have not already heard? We are repeatedly told it is better to be good than bad, to help each other rather than to kill each other, but we have the impression that nobody really believes that. And you?

*Encyclical "Redemptor Hominis" (R.H.), text published by LA DOCUMENTATION CATHOLIQUE, No 7, 1 April 1979. pp 301-323

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Before speaking of what must be done, the pope responds: let me tell you what there is. "Man cannot live without love" (R.H.II, 10). God, for whom your heart yearns, has come to you. Turn towards Him and you will know what has to be done. Now we have come to that, of which I shall give evidence.

Let us leave to the more authoritative the task of commenting upon the encyclical's theology. If we did speak of it we would cite the constant fidelity to Paul VI which is reaffirmed (and, with less emphasis, to John XXIII) as well as to the two texts of the Ecumenical Council, "Gaudium et Spes" on the church and the world, and "Lumen Gentium" on the church (particularly the latter). We would find that the letter places at the center of everything the mystery of a God assuming the form of a man in order to save all men, and then remaining among them in order to associate them with him in his work. The phrases are clear and well drafted, borrowing nothing from contemporary ideologies; they affirm the transcendence of God, the "worthlessness" of worldly things; they are frequently accompanied by appeals or admonitions to theologians (III, 19), to husbands, to priests, to catechists (III, 21), to critical (I, 4) or retrograde (I, 61 spirits); and to some others. "Classical" theology? "A catch-all?" "Nothing very new." Such was the opinion of a LE MONDE editorial (16 March 1979). Perhaps it was written a little too quickly.

When the great truths are placed in relation to the status of men today, they in fact make apparent the originality of what is hidden under the affirmation (less banal than it seems) of the actual existence of God the Creator and Savior, the "friend of man."

What does the pope who comes from Cracow say about this world? Does he anathematize communism? Does he reject exploitative liberalism? Does he counsel everyone to discharge honestly his duty to the state, mindful of his moral obligations to his neighbor? He presents matters in different fashion.

Here we have come to the very heart of the letter. The pope has taken pains to say it. "I would like to combine the church's mission and service to mankind," he explained in a short speech* on 11 March, "in its impenetrable mystery in the same way that I see and feel the relation between the mystery of redemption through Jesus Christ and the dignity of man. There I see the central task of my universal ministry."

The relations between the church and man--"4 billion people"--John Paul II unites under the somewhat surprising term "road," which is found to be repeated almost 20 times in the third section of his letter: "Christ along everyone's road," "All the roads of the church lead to man," and "Man is the church's road." It seems that in this imagery, coming from the Gospel, are several meanings.

The road, that is, the road to salvation, the movement which impels man, individually or collectively, towards truth is at first a matter of faith,

*LA DOCUMENTATION CATHOLIQUE, No 7, 1 April 1979, p 326

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and one day a matter of vision. In this sense "Jesus is the road of the church" and each one follows its road to Him. The road as leading to the goal. But the road can also be the obligatory passage to redemption. The road as a means. In this sense "Man is the road of the church." Let us listen: the church is responsible for all men--"every man with no exception"--it cannot be without limits of space or time. Its mission?" "Its road which immutably passes through the mystery of Incarnation and Redemption." Not only does the church proclaim these mysteries, but it lives them, and the more they are rooted in human reality ("individual...family...societies...nations...people...humanity"), and the more the latter deepens, opens out and changes, the more these mysteries are charged with meaning, reveal their force. Thus the church is tied to men, affected by their history (not to mention their various stories); it is also able, but indirectly and as an added benefit, to help them in discovering how to orient their temporal activities. It will be attentive to the "possibilities" which are provided, to the "threats" which are in the making, and last, to all which "seems contrary to the effort always to make human life more humane."

Thus posed is the possibility of progress, not without misteps, stumbles, and falls, but becoming deeper and turning inward, spiritual but unseen progress. From such progress another kind can arise; the establishment of more just and stable relationships among human groups, temporal progress, the "structure of the world" discussed in the document "Gandium et Spes." But the [Ecumenical] Council then sometimes seemed inclined to describe modern man in optimistic terms as "marching toward more complete development of his personality, toward a constantly increasing assertion of his rights."* John-Paul II, 15 years later, in particular finds there are contradictions in "progress." He sees contemporary man frightened by what he has made, that is, by the products of his hands and even more, of his intelligence, and trends of his desires." (III, 15).

Man now has the means to destroy all humankind, he can annihilate the natural environment in which he lives, and above all he can suffocate moral progress and promote "the trend to exploiting all material, technical, and productive progress for the sole purpose of dominating others." (III, 15). The encyclical thus affirms the contradiction in the historical movement, a concept appearing in the parable of the wheat and the tares developed by St Augustine in "The Citadel of God," which has been forgotten or distorted in modern times, denied by contemporary ideologies, and rediscovered and thoroughly discussed, especially in France, in several currents of philosophical and theological thought since the beginning of the century.** This concept of contrasting

*Vatican II Ecumenical Council, "L'Eglise dans le monde" (The Church and the World), Paris, Ed. du Centurion, 1966, Chapter IV, Section 41, paragraph 1, p 111

**In particular, see Jacques Maritain, "Pour une philosophie de l'histoire" (A Philosophy of History), Paris, Seuil, 1959; Henry Marrou, "Theologie de l'histoire" (The Theology of History), Paris, Seuil, 1968

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two-fold progress, in a good direction along with a bad one, of progress as tension between two poles which are unattainable but real, is that which arises from the collective experience of our century. It destroys the basis of every political fanaticism: there is no perfect Citadel! In a society of satiety, the society where nobody is starving. There is another side of the coin. The society wherein complete equality is achieved transforms into a society of inertia. And so forth.

Must we indeed be satisfied with a replete city? Reduce temporal history to a blind struggle for arms more or less high but always limited? The answer is that there does exist the possibility of progress but mainly accomplished above the historical movement, most of the time without men's knowledge. Temporal progress is not a straight-line movement but at best a saw-toothed line. The horizontal movement, forward, leads into a vertical movement, the upward, to the end. The space of history has two, if not three, dimensions.

Of this idea--"progress or threat"--progress which becomes a threat, a threat which can give birth to progress, the Pope gives two applications.

The first concerns that dramatic effect of progress which is accentuation of the inequality between rich and poor nations. Citing the parable of Lazarus and the wicked rich man* and further, the scene from the Last Judgment** ("I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat....") John-Paul II forcefully returns to the themes which he had expounded in Mexico. He explains that, even though "the mechanisms and structures are in question" solutions are nevertheless possible, of which he sketched some outlines, emphasizing the necessity for compromise, harmony between economic "competition" and the "redistribution" of wealth and between "planning" and "liberty." (III, 16), and speaking out against the amounts swallowed up in the arms trade.

Father Cosmao, the successor to Father Leuret, sees in this part "the heart of this encyclical." I am not of that opinion, for two reasons. The first is that the pope, in the encyclical, as in his speeches, seems to expect a slow evolution marked by numerous episodes during which different types of progress or of regression may appear. The second is that, according to Father Cosmao, "man develops upon the earth...and it is in so developing... that he travels toward God." I do not believe that this presentation is that of John-Paul II, no more than the idea of "collective self-creation of man" proposed farther on. Both neglect the contradictions of progress and the presence of the bad in history, and run the danger of ending up in myths very different from the views presented in the encyclical. The pope obviously is not comfortable with the present situation. Between that and "self-creation of man" there is a distance.

On the other hand, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is hailed as genuine progress, but still far from having produced the desired effects.

*Luke, 16, 19-31

**Matthew, 25, 31-46

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Along with such progress there is in fact found to be a growth of "great totalitarianisms," the acceptance of the "letter" of the law contrary to their "spirit," the existence of "authority imposed by a given group upon all other members of a society," and the denial of "religious freedom" which is a "fundamental right," and in consequence of these abuses, the danger of war since "in the final analysis peace narrows down to respect for the inviolable rights of man--opus justitiae pax--whereas war is born of violation of those rights and entrains still more serious violations of them" (III, 16-17). Here one finds an echo of the experiences of the archbishop of Cracow. About communism, about Marxism not a word is said. But the basic rights, the fundamental rights are claimed as indispensable to civil peace, to peace among nations, and to religious peace. "The principle of human rights deeply affects the sector of social justice and becomes the measure by which it may be verified in the life of political organizations."

What indeed is this new Advent about which John Paul II writes in the beginning of his letter? It is the discovery that the temporal world, as rich and as diversified as it may be, with its innovations and extraordinary changes, is dependent upon something more than itself. As soon as that is recognized, or simply felt, or still more modestly, not denied, the "dignity of man is established. The more the church centers upon the mystery of its origin and its final purpose, the more it serves humanity in its temporal status, the more it opens to it the "roads" which lead somewhere, and not to nothing but emptiness.

The new Advent is the end of the age of ideologies and the possibility of another age which will also include light and dark, but differently structured. This age to come may perhaps learn some lessons from contemporary catastrophes. The 20th century was to establish, definitively, individual freedom, social justice, the light of reason, and universal tolerance. To a certain extent it has done so. There is more of all that in our societies than formerly. But there is also more of something else which has grown at the same time--the tares with the wheat. Faced with, or under the weight of, that something else, men are turning away from tirelessly rehashed political speeches; they seek where they can, below, to the side, forward, and above. It is to help them see, according to John-Paul II, that the church must be itself in the fullest sense of the terms.

"To transcends the bounds of temporality and at the same time it thinks solicitously of everything which, within the dimensions of that temporality, has repercussions on the life of man, on the life of the human spirit... search for the truth. Insatiable need for the good, hunger for liberty, yearning for beauty, voice of conscience.... (IV, 18).

*[reference point not indicated in source text] "Le Redempteur de l'homme. Lettre encyclique de Jean-Paul II; un guide de lecture" (The Redeemer of Man. A guide to reading the encyclical letter of John-Paul II.) by V. Cosmao, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1979. p 21

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Again we see the three themes of the Pueblo speech: in the first place, serving the truth, which makes unity possible and establishes the dignity of man. Otherwise, the world goes drifting in accordance with Vladimir Soloviev's maxim: "Since we are all descended from apes, should we therefore love each other?"

The encyclical's maxim is different. "Since we come from elsewhere and are going elsewhere, let us try as best we can to grasp what we can do." This maxim responds to the wait for a new era, in which temporal activity, freed from the sacral and the absolute, would nevertheless retain a stability of its own, so the same time very important and of no importance at all. Very important, because linked to permanent values, of which everyone sees what he cannot do without, and of very little importance because of impermanence. Never truly successful, always realizing only approximations and approaches to a certain degree of justice, peace, equality, and liberty and not total justice, nor total peace, nor anything totally certain.

From this viewpoint it is astonishing that the pope nowhere mentions the necessity to limit the "absolute sovereignty" of states in order to move several steps forward toward the possibility, if not of peace, at least of pacification. It is true that such limitations upon sovereignty are implicitly contained in the chapter concerning human rights. It is also true that he could not discuss everything.

If "Redemptor Hominis" is compared with "Ecclesiam Suam," the first encyclical of Paul VI, published on 11 August 1964, similarities and differences can be seen. The spirit is the same, overtures and dialogue with Paul VI, a presence and concern with John-Paul II, but one is gentler and more serene, the other has more sharp edges, more fire. Both, in relation to the world, are extremely novel. It is no longer a question of the church's leading or reigning in the old sense. It is a matter of being there, of radiating less by directives than by presence, of letting the light pass through.

This new type of relationship between the church and the world makes more demands upon both: the church, purer and more transparent, but also more vulnerable, with fewer defenses; the world, more upon and less pretentious, but also more aware and less assured. It is not an easy relationship.

That is why I do not share the anxieties of Paul Thibaud who, in ESPRIT, fears that the encyclical, despite the good features he finds in it, defines a "spiritual authority above the political" and leads to "ecclesiastical interventionism,"* It seems to me that John-Paul II rather sees himself as a man certainly charged with looking to the future, but first and above all charged with letting pass a light which does not come from him. He puts himself at the intersection of the vertical and the horizontal. This is the way that he understands the church's mission and service to man. That is why, with respect to the world, he limits himself to outline directions in the area of rights as in that of inequality and that of the struggle against misery. He does not dictate. He points out landmarks, he indicates several methods.

*"Venu de la dissidence" (Growth of Dissidence) by P.Thibaud, ESPRIT, April 1979, pp 3-10

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At the same time, on the basis of his past life, he belongs to that category of men who have gone through the experience, and failure, of modern Prometheism, who know that it is necessary to seek elsewhere. Maintaining that he has unique and universal responsibilities, he has no need to reationalize, to grope in order to find the way. It is obvious, open to all to see. But the masses do not get it. Then, he says what there is to be said.

And his words hit the mark. Already there are responses. They come even from Poland. For example, Adam Michnik, in the name of the "lay left":

"Religious freedom is the most visible sign of the actual practice of civil rights. The attack of authority against that freedom is always symptomatic of the totalitarianization of intellectual life. There is no exception to that rule because totalitarian authority is the only one unable to accept the exhortation of St Peter and the apostles: 'God must be obeyed rather than men.' (Acts 5,29). In the language of the lay left this means that men, because of his human nature, has rights which no authority is justified in nullifying..."*

Michnik thus echoes Boukharine who, in a conversation with Boris Nikolaievski in Paris, March 1936, did not deny that the "ten commandments of Moses" were the basis of all humanism.** He also echoes Benjamin Constant, who wrote, in 1815: "The whole of citizens is sovereign... It does not follow that the whole of citizens, or those invested by it with sovereignty, can sovereignty do away with individual liberties... The assent of a majority in no way suffices to legitimize its actions in all cases: there exist those that nothing can justify...."

Thus appear signs, very different from those which so many French Catholics thought they were able to read in the way of the world. To be counted among these signs is the letter of John-Paul II, whose basic line is that it pays particular attention to the "mission of the church and service to man" in order better to unite them in inspiration without ever confounding them in application.

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*A.Michnik, "L'Eglise et la gauche, le dialogue polonais" (The Church and the Left; Polish Dialogues), Paris, Seuil, 1979, p 170

**"Boukharine et l'opposition a Staline" (Boukharine and the Opposition to Stalin) in "Sotsialisticheskit Vestnik," Collection No 4, New York, 1965, pp 93-94

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ROMANIA

VIOLATIONS OF FIRE REGULATIONS BLAMED IN STORE FIRE

Bucharest PENTRU PATRIE in Romanian No 6, Jun 79 pp 20-21

[Article by Dan Carageorghe: "A Spark Sets Fire to a Store and 'Illuminates' Gross Negligence"]

[Text] The newspapers, radio and TV promptly reported the fire that broke out in the well-known Bucharest store Victoria. Thanks to intensive and efficient measures, the fire was put out only 50 minutes after it started, as the military firemen took steps to rescue the people in danger, to check the spread of the fire and put out the existing centers, and to protect the merchandise not engulfed by the flames. As a matter of fact, a fire of such proportions in such a building and resulting in small material losses compared to what was in the store (There were also three victims) is a unique phenomenon in the technical literature. In Vienna, Brussels or Tokyo, to cite only a few examples, the fires that broke out in big modern stores resulted in almost complete destruction of the buildings and victims that bereaved hundreds and hundreds of families.

We repeat [sic], the fact that this tragedy could have been avoided is a thing to be remembered and appreciated as such. But the causes of it are all the more reprehensible, because the fire in the Victoria store was the end result of a whole "chain of weaknesses," a drop that filled the glass. It was irresponsibility and indifference to elementary, we repeat elementary, observance of the regulations in force to prevent and extinguish fires.

Let us begin with 28 September 1978, the date the complement and functions of the technical commission for psi [preventing and extinguishing fires] were determined by Decision No 132 issued by the director of the Victoria State Trade Enterprise, with Virgil Dumitriu, then deputy director, as chairman and Ion Popescu, chief of the administrative bureau, as secretary. The formation of this commission was to lead, naturally, to improvement of preventive activity and adoption of efficient measures.

By the same decision, every salesman, cashier, manager etc. was to be specifically instructed in his fire prevention duties at his post, all the regulation preventive and fire-fighting equipment was to be promptly provided, and the equipment was to be kept in perfect operating condition.

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Were these recommendations carried out? Let us see.

In February 1979 some officers of the Firemen's Command made a preventive check of the big stores in Bucharest (Bucur-Obor, Unirea, Bucuresti, Cocor and Victoria). What did they find? We find the answer in the survey "Going Through Some Trade Units in the Capital" published in the journal PAZA CONTRA INCENDIILOR for March. We quote: "... controls are still superficial at the Victoria store (controls of the above-mentioned technical commission for psi of the store -- our note)... The organized efforts toward guidance, control and periodic analysis of preventive and fire-fighting activity are insignificant and of poor quality... The managers of the store have not taken the proper measures to eliminate situations threatening the protection of the great material values in storage or in sales areas from fires... Maintenance materials and protective equipment to the value of more than 1 million lei were illegally stored in the ventilation station on the seventh floor of the Victoria store... The connections to the marking rooms /case de marcat/ are not protected from blows... Inadequately instructed personnel on some jobs confused the new type of powder and carbon dioxide extinguishers with the chemical foam ones... The samplings made showed that only 50 percent of the personnel knew where the evacuation routes are... The safety lighting has been out of order for over 2 years" etc. (At the time of this check, steps were taken to eliminate some defects at once, to replace some emergency repairs, and to clear the paths to hydrants and to emergency equipment etc., and the other defects were to be remedied as soon as possible.)

All these findings were reported to the competent ministry on 22 March 1979. We make special mention, and you will see why, of the following finding: "At the Victoria store sections of combustible materials were used to partition the elevator cage in the performance of welding operations with no surveillance on the floors, making it possible for any fire to break out and spread both to the sales areas and to the evacuation routes." Shortly after the above-mentioned check, a commission of experts from the Ministry of Domestic Trade went to the Victoria store and found these reports were true. On this occasion the store management assured them that every effort would be made to remedy the defects as soon as possible. The welding operations were merely suspended.

But on 9 April the welding work on lift No 4 was resumed. The responsible elements at Victoria ICS /State Trade Enterprise/ gave the fitter Nicolae Anton, from the Ascensorul Maintenance and Repairs Enterprise, a "permit to work with fire," authorizing him to do this work. But let us consider this permit, or rather this so-called permit. Article 315 of "Regulations for Preventing and Fighting Fires" issued by the Ministry of Domestic Trade says, "Welding operations where there is danger of fires or explosions will be performed solely with a fire permit specifying the nature and duration of the operations, the persons authorized to perform them, the measures to be taken to prevent and extinguish fires, the location of the job, their obligation to remove or protect inflammable materials in the vicinity, extinguishing equipment, the obligation to instruct the workers, the obligatory check upon completing the operations, and designation of the persons responsible for taking these measures..." How did Nicolae Anton's permit look? Everything was all right up to the heading "Measures,"

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which as we have seen clearly specified what was to be done from start to finish to prevent any risk of fire.

But none of these points was covered by the permit issued to Nicolae Anton. What right did those who issued this document have to abridge its content by excluding a series of provisions absolutely indispensable to the complete security of the place of work and of the person who performed the operation? Apparently they considered these provisions to be in the nature of things and so well known that there would be no point in mentioning them. But let us see who they are.

And so who signed the so-called "permit"? The workman, Nicolae Anton, and then the service fireman Mihai Gheorghe and the chief of the administrative bureau, Ion Popescu, secretary of the technical commission for psi at the Victoria ICS. At the entry "unit chief" the space was blank (another legal violation!), to say nothing of the fact that according to Supplement 5 of the Regulations this permit should have been approved in the first place by the chairman of the technical commission for psi. The respective chairman, in our case, did not even know about the welding that was being done at Victoria!

Let us consider Nicolae Anton for a moment. As we said, his main trade is that of a fitter. Therefore he is not a welder. What he could do was to set some welding points, or "afturi" [?] as they say in the trade. The work being done on the day of the fire, resistance welding on slide brackets, would have required the intervention of a qualified man and certainly not Nicolae Anton the fitter. Nevertheless Gheorghe Covacu, a team leader at Ascensorul and a work coordinator at the Victoria ICS, and Nicolae Vlasceanu, a foreman at Ascensorul and Anton's boss, entrusted the operation to Anton instead of stopping him from doing it, to say nothing of the fact that when they gave him the job they did not bother to give him the minimum knowledge of fire prevention measures in such cases. Outside of the fact that he had a "permit to work with fire" (And we know what kind of a permit!), Anton was a complete stranger to the most elementary standards of fire prevention. To be sure clause 13 of the contract between the Victoria ICS as beneficiary and the Ascensorul Enterprise stipulated that the beneficiary, the Victoria ICS, was responsible for psi. But the fact remains that the responsible elements at Ascensorul should have given the personnel under them a real briefing on psi, and as we have seen they did not do so. (In the conclusions of the investigation made after the disaster it is mentioned that after the fire some technical personnel at Ascensorul falsified the fitter Nicolae Anton's individual briefing card, adding corrections concerning a so-called briefing on observance of the psi regulations, which briefing was actually not given.)

On 10 April Nicolae Anton continued to perform the job of 9 April. Now, instead of the "permit to work with fire" that he should have had for that day, he had only a copy of the one for 9 April. On the upper right of this copy the service fireman Gheorghe Mihai (You read it, the service fireman!) illegally wrote the date of 10 April 1979! And thus "covered," Nicolae Anton went to work.

The heat flow produced by the electric arc gives off a temperature of 3,500-4,000 degrees, high enough to melt the material to be welded. But the latter is ejected into the surrounding space in the form of sparks, which have a high thermal

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capacity to ignite the nearby materials and substances. And since there was a storeroom for the men's haberdashery section near Anton's place of work (elevator No 4 on the third floor), which storeroom was separated from the elevator shaft solely by a plywood wall with no fireproofing, and since highly inflammable goods that burn rapidly and extensively were shelved in this storeroom...

The experts who investigated the causes of this fire found them in the serious violations of the psi regulations, the disorder and indiscipline evidenced in this area, and the inexcusable laxity of some managers and executives, particularly at the Victoria ICS but also at the Ascensorul Enterprise.

And in this whole cycle of violations of the legal standards and in the midst of the negligence and indolence of people who should have protected the store from the risk of fire, one spark was enough. In fact the inquiry revealed a certain dangerous attitude in this respect. The responsible elements considered the plan tasks to be of first importance, relied upon the common sense and correct conduct of their people, and did not "bother" them further with the measures to protect people's lives and the merchandise in the store from fires.

We were in the Victoria store with a psi inspector after it reopened. The measures that have been taken evidence a real concern that the unit shall no longer be threatened by fire and that the employees, customers and goods shall be quite safe. The reporter mentioned that he still meets responsible elements, directors of enterprises or institutions, who are "burdened" by the fire-prevention measures required by law. That is why he resolved to present this accident of the Victoria store to the readers, since it proves the existence of such attitudes and their consequences as well.

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