

Japan slams door on Hare Krishnas

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TOKYO — The Japanese government has had it with the Hare Krishna, the saffron-robed, pig-tailed priests who hawk religious pamphlets in the name of God.

Citing numerous cases in which Krishna monks allegedly have strong-armed Japanese commuters, slapped around old ladies and extorted money from children, the Japanese Ministry of Justice said Friday it will not allow any more of the sect's priests into Japan.

Visas of the 28 Hare Krishnas already in Japan will not be

extended when they expire, thus insuring the end of the sect's rather ambiguous five-year campaign to convert this nation's 110 million Buddhists to Buddhism.

"Who do these funny-looking Americans think they are trying to sell Buddhism to us," shouted a shoe repairman at Tokyo's Shinjuku Railroad Station, the city's busiest commuter station, where Hare Krishna exploits have become legend.

It was here, Tokyo police say, that a Krishna monk last month chased after an 8-year-old Japanese schoolgirl he felt had not donated enough for a pamphlet.

When he caught her he shook her until she gave another 100 yen (about 35 cents).

Witnesses to this episode of evangelical exuberance summoned a corner cop, who arrested the monk.

In another case of misdirected religious persuasion, a 70-year-old woman was slapped repeatedly in the face by a monk after she criticized the sect's tactics.

"Why don't these barbarians go home to America and convert Americans," the shoe repairman said, pointing an unsoled shoe at two yellow-robed monks.

The repairman's suggestion may be a valid one. In five years of missionary work here the priests have converted only five Japanese to their sect.

Hare Krishna, which preaches the abolition of political and religious strife in order to build a peaceful world, originated in India, but has its headquarters in the United States.

While members of the Tokyo sect admit that they may have been a little too "exuberant" in their attempts to convert the mild-mannered Japanese, they feel they are the victims of reli-

gious persecution conducted by the Japanese government.

It's all a frame-up, charged the sect's leader, John Williams, 25, of San Francisco. We came here with the best of intentions and now the Japanese are throwing us out of the country, just like they did the Christian missionaries who came here in the 16th century.

"We are not the barbarians, it is the Japanese," complained another Krishna monk. "They are racists."

"This kind of harassment is unwarranted," charged Williams,

☆☆☆ Section A Page 25
Sunday, Sept. 14, 1975
S.F. Sundry Examiner & Chronicle

whose Hare Krishna name is Karnaritas Das. "We don't want trouble, but the people here are totally unreceptive to us. I've never seen a country like this in my life. These people are without religion."

The Japanese, who take their religion in equal doses of Shintoism and Buddhism, disagree.

Just because we aren't fanatics about religion like these lunatics doesn't mean we aren't a religious people," chided the shoe repairman. "We are a spiritual people. We don't need pamphlets and pretails to make us religious."