

NEWS

Protestants and Other Americans United

FOR SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

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STATE DEPARTMENT ASKED TO PROTEST AT VATICAN

A predominantly Protestant organization, Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State, has asked Christian A. Herter, Secretary of State, to instruct the United States Ambassador to Italy to protest at the Vatican what it called "the calculated attempt by the Roman Catholic bishops, supported by the Vatican, to discredit and destroy the Puerto Rican Governor Munoz Marin."

Mr. Herter was asked to have the ambassador register specifically at the Vatican a protest against "clerical interference with the foreign policy of the United States government, which has taken pride in the social and economic achievements of the Puerto Rican administration under the leadership of Munoz Marin; clerical interference in the Puerto Rican election, since Puerto Rico has commonwealth status as a part of the United States; and voting orders by bishops violate its freedom; and clerical interference with the successful fight against communism waged by this administration in Puerto Rico and its salutary effect upon the entire effort of the United States government against the spread of communism in Latin America."

In a companion statement released with the letter, C. Stanley Lowell, associate director of POAU, declared that "for several years our State Department has offered Munoz Marin's popularly supported regime in Puerto Rico as its answer to the Latin American dictators, Trujillo, Peron, Jiminez, Rojas and Batista. Success of its policy is indicated by the steady decline in the ranks of Latin American dictators and the return of representative government in a number of countries.

"Now the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Puerto Rico organizes its own political party and issues voting orders to Catholics with the avowed purpose of defeating and destroying Munoz Marin, the man who has importantly symbolized the hopes of the free world. The reasons are clear. Munoz Marin has not been acquiescent to the Vatican demands, as the concordat dictators have been. He has refused to let the Catholic Church control the public schools of Puerto Rico. He has refused to let this church enforce its ban on birth control on the terribly overpopulated Island. He has declined to let the church censor movies, TV programs, and printed publications. He has steadfastly held out against subsidies for Catholic schools.

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"This interference by the bishops in the political campaign in Puerto Rico has as its purpose the destruction of the image of democratic success so carefully built up by our State Department. No American citizen -- and this includes millions of Roman Catholic Americans -- will countenance this action. This is the most brazen act of clericalism ever attempted in the public affairs of our nation. If this sort of thing could be attempted in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, it could be attempted in the continental United States."

(The full text of the POAU letter to Secretary of State Herter accompanies this statement.)

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