

What Would Gov. Munoz Do?

By HAROLD J. LIDIN

Would Muñoz Marin "excommunicate" from the Popular Party—or otherwise severely punish—any follower who publicly defies his stand in the Church-State conflict?

At least once before Muñoz "excommunicated" party members who strayed from his political doctrinal line. On February 10, 1946, a decree was promulgated by the Muñoz-ste-

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ered PPD Central Committee that made membership in the Pro-Independence Congress "incompatible" with Popular Party discipline.

Catholic circles suspect that Muñoz is again prepared to take reprisals against any Popular who challenges him on the Church issue.

Silent Prestige

This Catholic speculation stems in part from the failure of any prominent Popular to stand up and announce publicly that he favors striking from the PPD platform the clause denounced by the bishops as "moral relativism."

For there are men of prestige and position within the Popular Party—insist Catholic circles—who are anxious to see the controversial clause dropped from the platform.

That these Populares delay their demand for removal of the clause can only mean they fear the mighty wrath of Muñoz Marin, comment the Catholics.

It is the silence of Catholic Populares that perhaps distresses the bishops' supporters more than the public outcry against the pastoral letters. For that

uproar was expected—and much of it came anyway from recognized anti-clericals.

And this same silence has generally convinced Catholic leaders that the pastoral letters were in truth an absolute necessity.

"We now realize they should have come sooner," commented one priest.

For the election results—which saw hundreds of island Catholics vote Popular in defiance of the hierarchy—shook the clergy into an awareness of just how deep a grip Muñoz has gained on the mind and emotions of Puerto Ricans.

Now the Church realizes how thick is the "democratic image" that sheathes Muñoz Marin in the states.

It is a matter of wonder in Catholic circles how the same newspapers who applaud the "courageous" Cuban bishops for criticizing Castro can denounce the Puerto Rican hierarchy for eddling in politics.

No Dent Made

Even the statement by Civil Liberties Union adviser Roger Baldwin that the Puerto Rican bishops were exercising the right of free speech with their pastorals did not dent the picture that Muñoz was the hapless victim of clerical assault.

Nor do Catholics expect the press will reverse its position and clobber the Cuban hierarchy, if and when it "prohibits" Catholics from supporting Fidelismo,—given the realities of the cold war.

Muñoz is a friend of the United States, Castro is its enemy. And until that situation changes the Catholics here are resigned to what they term a "contradictory" position by the press.

But the Church cannot be the handmaiden to U. S. foreign policy. Just because Washington might love Muñoz is no valid reason for the Church to like him, they add.

And Catholics will continue to hope that in time the pastoral letters will be recognized not as the "aggressions" of a power-hungry hierarchy, but as deeply democratic documents.

In a true democracy, it is argued the loyalty of a citizen to a legitimate institution should be above loyalty to a politician.