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THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS
OVER CUBA AND THE CONGO

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THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS OVER CUBA AND THE CONGO

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[Following is a translation of an article entitled, "Ten' Kresta nad Auboy i Kongo", (The Shadow of the Cross over Cuba and the Congo), by I. Grigulyavichyus, in Kommunist (The Communist), VII'nyus, No 10, October 1960, pages 67-70.]

Our reader Viktoras Mikalluskas from Shaulyay asked us to explain the position of the Catholic Church in the national liberation movements of the African and Latin American nations.

As an answer to this question we are reprinting an article by I. Grigulyavich (Lavretskiy) - author of the book The Vatican. Religion, Finances and Policies.

The Pope and the Catholic Church hierarchy verbally represent themselves as friends of the distressed and guardians and protectors of the peoples of Latin America and Africa who are in the process of throwing off the yoke of imperialism. In deeds, however, the clergy represents the best and the staunchest assistants of colonialism. The recent events in Cuba and the Congo are a good proof of this assertion.

The majority of the Cuban population is Catholic. It would therefore seem, that under these circumstances, the church hierarchy would be obliged to protect the interests

of the local population. In reality, however, the church hierarchy has always been on the side of the oppressors of the Cuban people.

In the 19th century during the struggle for independence, the church had also taken its position by the side of the colonizers. Jose Marti (1853-1895) the greatest Cuban patriot and advocate of Cuban freedom, repeatedly condemned the clergy for supporting the colonizers. Shortly before his death (Marti was killed during the war against the Spanish colonizers), the Cuban patriot began to write a book dedicated to the peasants. In it he exposed the Catholic Church as the oppressor of the Cuban people. This work, which remains unfinished, begins with: "Countrymen! Do not show this book to your village priest, because he strives to keep you in ignorance so that you will turn to him for advice on every little problem. And as he takes money from you for pouring water on the head of your little child, for proclaiming you the husband of your wife, a fact you already know since you love her and she loves you, and as he receives money for births, baptisms, marriages and for praying for your soul and for your death, and as he refuses to bury you if you do not pay him, - the priest has no desire to let you find out that all this is superfluous because then he would stop taking your money for it. And as they unjustly exploit your ignorance, I, an unbeliever, want your money for my book in order to talk to you and tell you the truth." Marti exposed the union between the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the American millionaires and the social demagoguery and anti-national policies of the Catholic Church.

When the USA, under the pretext of helping the Cuban patriots, occupied the country (in 1898) and the government in power in Cuba was in the service of American monopolies, the Catholic Church supported it and denounced the movement for national independence. The First Cuban Constitution in 1901 separated the church from the state, but the American occupiers of Cuba forced the Cubans to pay the church a million dollars as reparations for her losses during the war for independence. And they made the Catholic priest Varona the president of the University of Havana.

The anti-national character of the Catholic Church in Cuba also can be seen by the fact that a majority of this country's Catholic clergy is made up of North Americans and Spaniards - zealous enemies of the working man and national liberation movements. The Catholic clergy was benevolently disposed toward the dictatorship of Batista, who was a protégé of American monopolies. Many a prelate, as for example, the Bishop Cienfuegos Martinez Dalmau, collaborated with the bloody dictator.

After the overthrow of Batista, Cuba's clerical circles

became the sources of the various counterrevolutionary talk and provocations. At the end of November 1959, when the new wave of anti-government, Washington inspired plots began to grow in Cuba, the Church called a Catholic Congress in Havana. The reactionary American press called it the largest anti-communist mobilization since the fall of the Batista dictatorship. Pope John XXIII, himself, sent his blessings to the Congress. The speakers at the Congress defended the "holy" right of private property, that in the light of confiscations of large estates and the properties of the former members of the Batista clique that was undertaken by F. Castro's revolutionary government could only indicate the condemnation of its righteous deeds.

Fidel Castro himself, exposed the maneuvers of the clergy. He stood up before their believers and unbelievers, and said, that the landowners, whose interests were hampered by the land reform, want to use the church to wage war against the government. When Christ preached, said Castro, he chose not 12 landowners, but 12 fishermen to assist him. The revolutionary army that liberated Cuba from Batista's dictatorship was made up of such simple working men.

Several weeks ago, two Cuban priests, Eduardo Aguerre and Ramon Farrell, fled to the USA and asked for political asylum because Fidel Castro's government had deliberately declared the Catholic Church a "national church", i.e. independent of Rome. This ugly joke lasted only 24 hours. It was refuted by Bishop Diaz, who notified the press that: "We know nothing whatsoever about the Cuban government's intentions to proclaim a national church independent from Rome. We have had no word that the government would in any way interfere with the Catholic priest's right to carry out his religious duties."

But the provocations continued. In January 1960, in a television speech, Fidel Castro exposed a plot organized by the agents of American imperialism, in which an active part was taken by the Spanish clergy-phalanxes serving in Cuba. In a letter from one of the conspirators, Yabor, captured by the authorities and read by Fidel Castro, it said that Yabor was receiving help from the clergy and had a printing press along with arms and dynamite hidden in a church. These exposures by Fidel Castro evoked a stormy reaction from the phalanx representative in Havana who tried to break into the television studio and interrupt the appearance of the Cuban speaker. The phalanx diplomat received an appropriate rebuff. The Cuban government exposed him in an "unflattering light" and sent him out of the country. On 7 August 1960, the Cuban Episcopate published a slanderous message to its congregation, in which the favorite American imperialist charge of Cuban government's communist sympathies

was repeated.

Fidel Castro once again exposed the agreement between the church and the imperialists. On 11 August, in an appearance before a group of directors of a sugar cooperative, the Cuban premier accused the American legation of entering into an agreement with the Fascist clergy in order to provoke a conflict between the Cuban church and government. Castro declared: "There is no doubt that the American Embassy is using its last resources. There is no doubt that the impudent American imperialism threw its lot in with Franco and his fascists to mobilize all their influence with the help of our country's clergy on whom they can depend. Not all the clergy is fascist. There is also clergy that is sympathetic to the revolution. But there is no doubt that Franco can count on the support of a majority of this fascist clergy." The premier asked why the Catholic prelates who are criticizing the spread of communism in Cuba in their pastoral messages, do not condemn the horrors of imperialism. "I would like to see a pastoral message that would condemn the crimes of imperialism and the little bombs of our sugar cane fields and our cities and Cuba's exploitation by large companies," said Castro. "I would like to see a pastoral message that condemns the criminal plan of the imperialists who have invaded our country...I would like to see a pastoral message condemning Franco's crimes and butchery."

Castro charged that the "traitors in the service of imperialism" and a "group of counterrevolutionaries, who are trying to hide in churches" stand in the way of the revolutionary regime. He emphasized that the government advocates "tolerance toward all religious sects and institutions.... We are fighting against the landowners and not the clergy."

The counterrevolutionary activity of the Cuban clergy is still another clear indication that the Catholic hierarchy in the Vatican acts in the interest of American imperialists.

The Vatican is changing its policies in Africa. It is supporting the independence of African nations. The pope named a Negro Bishop a Cardinal, trying to prove by this his sympathies for Africa. How many of these and similar confirmations can be read in the pages of the bourgeois press that represents the Roman pope as a friend of the awakening Africa.

When the Congolese people repudiated the Belgian imperialists, the bourgeois press, in approval of the proclaimed independence and not sparing the ink, depicted the "generosity" and "altruism" of the Belgian government, headed by the Christian Party. Yet it soon became clear that the

Christian "benefactors" had no intention of vacating the country they made "so happy". Making use of all possible provocations and slander, the Belgian colonizers attempted to overthrow the lawful government of the independent Congo and remain there. When this attempt proved unsuccessful, they decided to be contented with something smaller. They tried to separate from the Congo its richest province - the Katanga province. For this purpose they used the puppet Congolese leader Tshombe.

It is well known that the Belgian colonizers were supported by the American imperialists under whose influence are the UN officials too. The Catholic Church, under the rope of Rome, and the missionaries working in the Congo came out in support of the enemies of the Congolese people.

From day to day the Belgian clerical press called for a bloody engagement with the Congolese people. The Catholic Party organ Libre Belgique wrote in one of its numbers: "The Congo was won with the help of arms, it would therefore be strange if our present day army could not stay there with the help of planes and rifles." The clerical presses of Italy, the German Federal Republic and other capitalist countries speak against the Congo. And at the UN Security Council the representative of the Italian Clerical Government crawled out of his shell and defended the interests of Belgian colonizers.

In the Congo itself, the missionaries supported the colonizers actively. Belgian soldiers were hiding in the missions, the Belgians transported arms under missionary garb along with their trustworthy agents and spies from one side of the country to the other. The monks did not hesitate to hide Belgian parachutists as Premier Lumumba stated in one of his press conferences.

The Catholic Church exerts its influence in favor of the Belgian colonizers and thus shows itself as a mortal enemy of the national liberation movement. In the Congo, the Catholic Church defends the imperialist interests because they are closely related with its materialist interests. As the well-known Belgian progressive worker Isabella Blum notes, the Catholic Church appears as the international match-maker between the "Unione Minier du Katanga" and the powerful financial faction "Societe Generale de Belgique" that controls Belgian economy. The Belgian colonizers carry out the orders of these imperialist monopolies in the Congo. In the Congo, the Church has huge tracts of land at its disposal and owns other property. Can one therefore wonder that Pope John XXIII receives and graciously gives his blessings to the envoys of the traitor Tshombe, with pleasure no less greater than that of the Belgian King Baudouin.

The hostile attitude of the clergy toward the Congolese

Independence was reported by Premier Lumumba in an interview with the representatives of the Italian newspaper Unita in August 1960.

"We have never fought against the Catholic Church. We fought against the colonial regime. The sharpening of the relations between our people and the missions was evoked by the fact that some of the Catholic missions turned into centers for enemy propaganda aimed against the Congolese nationalist movement. The bishops and the clergy held responsible political posts in the colonial administrative machine. Some of them even led anti-Negro propaganda. I myself have protested against these actions before the high Church Hierarchy, but to no avail. Such is the way the Catholic missions made many mistakes and lost the trust of our people. On the basis of these considerations we expect that our future constitution will have to separate the church from state clearly and definitely, in order to put an end to things identified with the colonial regime.

The events in the Congo have unmasked the friends of the African people - the Vatican and the Catholic Church Hierarchy - and exposed them as agents of colonialism and the worst enemies of the movement for national independence.