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Friction Between Church and Castro Regime Increasing

In his television speech of 18 July, Premier Fidel Castro denounced the "counterrevolutionary activities" of "Falangist" priests whom he accused of being responsible for the spontaneous anti-Communist demonstrations by Havana churchgoers on 17 and 18 July. Castro said that "the reactionary clergy has not been bothered" by his regime and declared that "the people must not permit themselves to be dragged into the game" by counterrevolutionary demonstrators. The charges of the Cuban leader, who interrupted his convalescence to deliver the blast, indicate the regime's concern with increasing evidences of church opposition to the government's growing economic and political ties with the Communist world. [US Ambassador Bonsal feels that Soviet Premier Khrushchev's 9 July statement of support for Cuba has been a serious blow to the Castro regime in that, by clarifying any doubt regarding the Communist orientation of the government, it has put Castro on the defensive.]

Despite the publication last May of a strongly anti-Communist pastoral letter by the archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, most church authorities have hesitated to take a firm public stand against Castro or his policies. Church officials previously have admitted that they have only limited influence with the Cuban people and that, unless careful preparations were made, most Cubans would support Castro in the event of a showdown between him and the church. Divergent attitudes toward Castro by the large number of Spanish-born priests in Cuba and the native Cuban clergy may also hinder church unity on the question.

The Catholic hierarchy's determination to oppose the Castro regime openly may be hardened by the government's use of force in suppressing the anti-Communist demonstrations on 17 and 18 July. According to Ambassador Bonsal, the incidents have created a tenser atmosphere within influential Catholic lay circles, and serious repercussions may develop. [REDACTED]

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