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The Right Kind of 'Involvement'

Still unclear is the extent of American participation in the stormy events in Cuba. If the American government did more than just cheer the rebels on—and apparently it did do more—then how much more? Was this a Pentagon caper? Or was it Mr. Dulles and his CIA? Certainly the majority of American citizens have been unaware over the months of any government participation in plans to get rid of Castro. At this point we don't even know what it is that we don't know. Yet we ought to know if we, and our sons, may be called upon to visit Cuba.

But one essential thing we do know. We do know that whatever has been the extent of American involvement in the Cuban situation, it has been less great than that of the Soviet Union. American equipment, from what we read, is less in evidence than is Russian equipment. The American hand, which may have been in Cuban affairs, has been in less deeply than the Russian hand. President Kennedy, whom the Russians accuse of talking tough, has not spoken as truculently as the Russians.

This trip to the brink, like other and similar trips, could mean war, a war we don't want. However, we think it more likely that it will result in something similar to an earlier attempt by the Russians to extend world communism. Right after World War II, Western Europe was ripe for communism. Poverty, disease, hopelessness, despair were the lot of the French, the Greeks, the Italians and the West Germans. Strong Communist parties, encouraged by Moscow, grew stronger. Yet, 15 years after the war, France, Greece, Italy and West Germany are still non-Communist. Why?

The difference was the Marshall Plan, a scheme that pulled the rug out from under the Communists.

Given the opportunity to reach the

higher living standard that had seemed so impossible, the countries of Western Europe had no need to resort to communism. They responded heartily to the American offer of assistance. Communism, shorn of its greatest appeal, made no further inroads in that area.

Communism still has an appeal in Latin America. The standard of living in that region is low, in some areas as low as the standard that was imposed upon Western Europe by war. There is hopelessness, too, as peasants and workers despair ever of freeing themselves from the dead hand of tradition, from debt, from almost certain servitude. Communism offers help, help that is needed so sorely that communism's dreadful price is hardly considered.

That's how Castro came to power. It was not only because he was stronger. His secret lay in the reason he was stronger. He was stronger because the Cuban people, among the best off of Latin Americans, wanted something better than they could hope for under the old regime.

It may be too late now to pull the rug from under Castro. But it is not too late to anticipate other Castros in other Latin American nations—and there will be others as long as the hopelessness upon which demagogues feed is there to nourish them. A Marshall Plan for Latin America, often talked about, has never really had much popular support in this country. If the Cuban fiasco serves no other purpose, it may spur us on to export hope. Hope, in the guise of aid, costs money, but it doesn't cost as much money as a week of a first-class war.

Americans, we think, once they are mindful of the need for a positive program in Latin America, will applaud such a plan, even as now they question and wonder what's been going on in a land to which we did not offer this hope.