

ALAMEDA, CALIF.
TIMES-STAREVENING 9,030
MAY 18 1961

Castro's Bulldozer Offer Could Prove To Be His Undoing

Has Castro been persuaded to hire a crack public relations man?

That certainly seems a highly logical possibility in his offer to exchange some 1,000 prisoners, taken in the abortive U. S.-sponsored attempt to overthrow him, for 500 bulldozers. For though the proposal seems a wild one to some, it is actually extremely smart.

Throughout Latin America the United States is thought of as a highly dollar-conscious country. Our public image is that of a people who think primarily in terms of money, putting a dollar value on everything, including human life.

Because of the blundering stupidity with which the Cuban invasion was conducted — due to the bumble-headed, if not almost treasonably conducted workings of the Central Intelligence Agency — it is now universally known that none of the 1,000 prisoners would be in the hands of Castro except for the actions of the United States.

In brief, the United States is responsible for their being in captivity just as much so as if they were really members of our armed forces.

Therefore, thanks to this offer by Castro, our country is put on the horns of a dilemma in the eyes of Latin America and the world.

The dilemma is: are we, a people who evaluate everything in terms of dollars, going to evaluate the lives of 1,000 men and find them worth 500 bulldozers?

If we decide that we shall not take advantage of the offer to free the 1,000 at this price, then the public image from which we now suffer in all Latin America — that of the ugly American — will be confirmed.

"Look at the Americans," they will say. "If they don't consider that the life of a man who risked his own life for the United States is worth half a bulldozer, what price would they put on the life of one of their ordinary people? Would they consider him worth maybe the price of a secondhand car, or \$10, or a dime? Or would it be merely nothing?"

On the other hand, if we do decide to accept the offer and free the 1,000 at the rate of two men for one bulldozer, what will happen then?

The answer lies in how we do it. Castro, of course, is convinced that we will not accept the offer, and that if we do, we will handle the matter with the same degree of intelligence that characterized the invasion. Quite possibly he is correct.

However, if we were to handle it along different lines, the results would be radically different and extremely embarrassing to the bearded butcher who thinks that Khrushchev is the greatest thing that happened since Stalin.

What we should do is accept the offer and prepare the bulldozers immediately. Each bulldozer and all its major parts should have stamped into the metal, in Spanish, that it was a gift from the American people to the Cuban people, given for the purpose of saving lives. And not just the lives of the 1,000, but also the lives of countless others who would be greatly benefited if the bulldozers were used in works of peace.

That done, the bulldozers should be loaded onto a ship along with plenty of food and the other essentials for a tremendous party to be staged at the unloading in Havana.

From the time the ship sails, and well before for that matter, there should be constant radio and TV broadcasts in Spanish telling the Cubans about how happy we are to do this — that we actually think the price is cheap.

"Certainly we think the lives of two Cubans are worth one new bulldozer," we should say. "In fact, we think them worth much more. Castro could just as easily have held us up for five times that amount. And we would have willingly paid."

"But what value does Castro set on your lives. How much has he ever expended for a Cuban life, beyond the price of the bullets used for those sent to the wall?"

Since the Cubans and other Latin Americans are really a brilliant people, with especial reference to politics and appreciation of political maneuver, such a gambit as that would have tremendous impact.

The only ones who would not laugh would be those who did not dare — who found it impractical. For what is funnier than a man who is hoist by his own petard — as Castro would then be.

And what weapon is deadlier to any dictator anywhere than laughter? There is none. It is a weapon feared far more than dagger, bullet or any bomb.