

POINT OF VIEW

Fidel Castro Riding Higher

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Fidel Castro is riding higher in Central and South America than at any time since the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis, according to information available in Washington.

And his current campaign to gain "acceptability" in this hemisphere has clearly gotten a boost from Senator Fulbright's pronouncement that the Castro Communist regime is here to stay indefinitely.

This dictum by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman was not cleared or approved by President Johnson. Senator Fulbright's views have been quietly but decisively repudiated by insiders as any sort of guideline to United States policy.

On the contrary, President Johnson is personally deeply engaged in the fight to lead the Organization of American States in an effective condemnation of Mr. Castro for his aggressive actions in the fall of 1963 in sending a huge arms cache to Venezuela for guerrilla warfare.

Unfavorable Trend

But the prevailing psychological winds are unfavorable to these United States efforts and it will take all Mr. Johnson's most eloquent persuasion to counteract the lackadaisical attitude of most Latin American states toward this proof of Cuban subversion. Most Latin diplomats give the impression, publicly, that they would like to sweep this proof quietly under the rug so that nothing would have to be done about it.

And the person most entitled — alas — to say "I-told-you-so" concerning the improving psychological climate around Mr. Castro is none other than Nikita

Khrushchev, who did a great deal to master-mind the whole thing.

Information available to the intelligence community shows that Premier Khrushchev has long been arguing that Mr. Castro should adopt a more reasonable stance and trot out praise of peaceful co-existence with a view to disarming his enemies psychologically, depriving Washington of arguments for sustaining punitive action such as economic boycotts, and finally in order to re-establish — not friendship — but trading relations with the United States so that Russian subsidies of the Cuban economy could be lowered.

It took the better part of a year for the Kremlin to tame Mr. Castro's temper and it is only in the recent past that he has—with an exception or two—played the role of the sensible statesman who is willing to do business (of sorts) with Uncle Sam if Uncle Sam will only be sensible in return.

It is standard Marxist theory, of course, that "greedy capitalists" will rush to trade with the Communists once the atmosphere is defused of crisis. And the United States wheat deal with the Soviet Union was bound to have an enormous psychological impact despite all the fine-print arguments about how different this is from trade with Cuba. Psychologically these arguments will not wash. The reason is this: Everybody knows that Cuba could not exist without Russia's protection and support and therefore anything that serves Russia's interests at this point serves Cuba as well.

Used as Excuse

In any case, the wheat deal (puny as it was) served as the excuse for France, Britain and

other allies to deal with Mr. Castro, enhancing his respectability and acceptability in this hemisphere and the world.

The United States made another psychological mistake, which like the wheat deal, dates back to things for which President Johnson was not responsible. This was the belief that Mr. Castro's exposure (in the missile crisis) would brand him a Soviet puppet and contribute to his ostracism.

This writer has seen in a recent trip to Central America how quickly Mr. Castro has regained his Robin Hood image, especially among the young.

There is more sophistication among Latin diplomats, whose private utterances are far different than the tolerant public attitudes toward Mr. Castro that are the fashion. The Latins say bluntly that in lifting the 1962 blockade prematurely under conditions that left Mr. Castro a Soviet protectorate, the United States gave the impression that the Cubans had carried a great part of the day. And said one diplomat, "Castro is still the only recent Latin who has said 'Yankee go home' and made it stick."

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