

Boycotting Cuba *NR 12/28/63*

The government's Cuba policy has a certain logic, argued thus: If, during the next year or so, shipping companies of the "free world" withdraw all of their vessels from the Cuba trade (and these vessels now account for about 50 percent of all such trade), Castro will be forced to depend for survival entirely on the Communists. But these allies of Castro, so the reasoning continues, are going to find the burden of that dependence intolerable. And when they no longer find it worthwhile to keep Castro afloat, he will drown.

This is the logic underlying new restrictions announced in Washington last week on foreign shippers who trade with Cuba. Heretofore, if a foreign ship owner allowed one of his vessels to go to Cuba, only that particular vessel was put on the US blacklist. Henceforth, if a shipper wishes to carry any US-financed cargo, he will have to agree in writing to take all of his vessels out of Cuba trade, once his present contracts for such trade have expired.

How much would it hurt foreign shipping concerns were they not allowed to carry US-government-financed cargoes? Not much. In 1962, out of 291.7 million long tons of US cargo shipped from this country, US-financed cargo carried in foreign bottoms amounted only to eight million tons. To be deprived of this business means being deprived of carrying about three percent of all US shipments. The new restrictions will inconvenience Castro (and foreign shippers) but that is all.

Washington is bemused by the statistic that Cuba is costing the Russians about \$1 billion a year. No doubt Mr. Khrushchev would prefer to reduce this extravagance. But can he risk being sued by Castro for non-support, with all that would mean to the Soviet "image" throughout the Communist world?

There is another question, pertinent this week. Is the suffering of the Cuban people a defensible American objective? And if that is not the American objective, what purpose does a partial blockade serve?

It must be asked also whether an economic war against Cuba, directed from Washington, weakens or strengthens Castro among his own people. Jean Daniel reports in this issue of *The New Republic* that it stiffens the Cuban spine.

It would seem to us in the national interest to decrease, rather than increase, Castro's reliance upon the Russians. For if that tie were loosened (though not necessarily broken), it might be possible to begin exploring how the Cuban revolution can be made tolerable to the community of American states. It is not the Sovietization nor the starvation nor the conquest of Cuba, but its restoration to membership in the American community, to which it belongs by geography and tradition, that should be the aim of diplomacy.