

Castro Survival Is Up to Moscow

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Peking's drastic reduction of rice shipments to hungry Cuba has all but eliminated Premier Fidel Castro's ability to act as a relatively independent leader within the Communist world.

Since the resulting anti-pathology has apparently burned the Chinese bridge behind him, Castro now appears to be entirely dependent on the Soviet Union for his survival.

At this point, it is difficult to tell whether this will affect Cuban relations with the United States. U.S. officials see no indications of a change up to now.

Nevertheless, over the long run, the enormous pressure that Russia can now exert on Cuba—its aid runs to more than \$300 million a year—could serve as a significant instrument for moderating Castro policies, particularly hemispheric subversion, and thereby ease the bitter U.S.-Cuban relationship.

Old Order Changes

Until about a year ago, Castro was able to maintain a large degree of independence by playing Moscow off against Peking. Whenever Russian policy displeased him—for example, if Moscow didn't give him all the aid he wanted—he would simply cozy up to the Chinese, lauding them in the newspapers and in speeches, and increasing trade with them if possible.

But in November, 1964, as it became clear that China could do nothing substantial for Cuba, Russia called Castro's bluff and virtually forced the Cuban leader to host a conference of Moscow-oriented Latin Communist parties. From then on, Castro's independence began to wither.

U.S. officials believe that the disappearance last summer of Industries Minister Che Guevara, a known sympathizer of the dogmatic Peking approach, was a part

of this withering process.

Last July, at a meeting in Warsaw commemorating the anniversary of Cuba's revolution, Red China for the first time took public note of Castro's absorption into the Soviet camp. Two Chinese newsmen read a prepared statement accusing Cuba of defending the "modern revisionists," meaning the Soviets.

More Belt Tightening

The latest flareup, as announced by Castro at a mass meeting on Jan. 2, involves the cut-down by Peking of its rice exports to Cuba from 285,000 metric tons in 1965 to 135,000 metric tons in 1966. The reduction will mean that the Cuban rice ration will shrink from six to three pounds per person a month, a severe cut in a nation that has already had to undergo drastic belt-tightening.

Red China, which barter its rice for Cuban sugar, has explained that it cannot

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spare more rice because of the need to build up a reserve in case of a U.S. attack, because of increased exports to war-torn North Vietnam, and because of deficits in other food crops.

Yet it has agreed to sell about 300,000 tons of rice to Japan this year, double last year's shipments.

That Peking has publicly castigated Castro for bringing the quarrel into the open appears to indicate that from now on it may be no more kindly in its rhetoric toward Havana than it is toward

Moscow.

Under Soviet Pressure

Castro's decision to slap China's wrist at this particular time suggests that Russia has begun to exert pressure on him in earnest. Castro's criticism came on the eve of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization now meeting in Havana.

The Soviet Union is anxious to reduce Red Chinese influence at the conference, which is not very great to start with. It wants, in particular, to broaden the group into an Afro-Asian-Latin American Peoples Solidarity Organization. The official inclusion of Latin far leftists would presumably help to counter China's influence among the Afro-Asians who are more sensitive to Chinese pressures than are the Latins.

If a new, expanded organization can be formed, Russia hopes it will hold its first meeting in Cairo. The organization as now constituted is slated to meet next in Peking in 1967.

Increased Soviet influence on Cuba in hemispheric affairs can already be detected in Cuban talk of the desirability of establishing popular fronts in some Latin countries. In the past, Castro had urged only violent revolutionary techniques as a means of promoting communism. He is still calling for such techniques, but the note of flexibility appears to be something new.

Some experts here speculate that when the Vietnam conflict is solved in substantial degree, the Soviet Union may start turning its attention to smoothing the way for improved U.S.-Cuban relations.

This could mean that Russia would try to "persuade" Castro to abandon subversion, at least for the time being, for the sake of reducing world tensions—an argument it is now using in North Vietnam, where Peking still has considerable influence.



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DAYS GONE BY—Ernesto (Che) Guevara, left, former Cuban Minister of Industry, met with Liu Shao-chi, President of Communist China, in Peking last February when a Cuban delegation visited there.