

THE HEMISPHERE

CUBA

Friendly Fidel

Fidel Castro generally is inclined to thumb his nose at the U.S. and at any other country that disagrees with him. Last week he changed his style and seemed to be waving and grinning all around. In a flurry of interviews with and invitations to U.S. newsmen, he sought to convince everybody that Cuba wanted nothing but peace and good fellowship with its neighbors—particularly the U.S.

Sugar, Anyone? For an opener Castro sought out the New York Times, which shares with the Associated Press the distinction of operating the only U.S. news bureaus in Havana. In 18 hours of talk, Castro laid it on thick for Times Correspondent Richard Eder—and the Times, in its characteristic fashion, gave Castro its front page for a forum. The bearded Cuban talked about reconciliation with the U.S., smoothly suggested that now was the time to normalize trade relations—meaning his lost sugar sales—and mused about the possibility of resuming diplomatic relations. He even admitted that he had supplied aid to guerrillas in other parts of Latin America, and airily offered to cease and desist if the U.S. would end its own subversive activity inside Cuba. “We do not hate you,” said Castro magnanimously. “If the U.S. is ready to

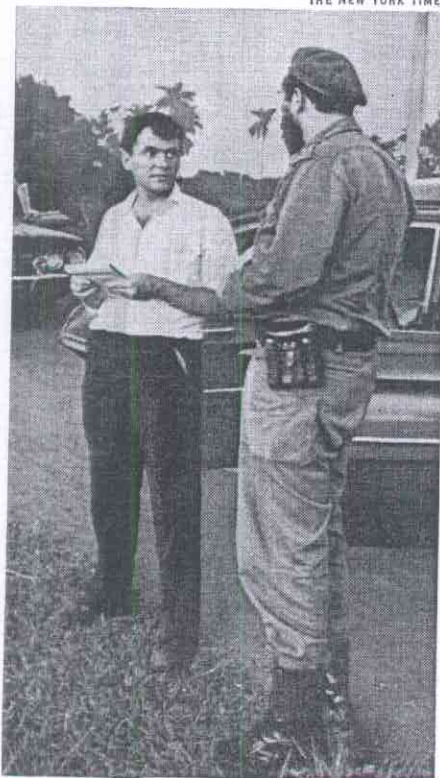
live with us, then we would feel the same obligation.”

No sooner was the Times interview in print than Castro wired 25 U.S. newspapers and magazines, “cordially” inviting them to send representatives to Cuba to witness the country’s July 26th anniversary celebration in Santiago in eastern Oriente province. Most of the big-city papers were included, from the San Francisco Chronicle to Boston’s Christian Science Monitor. *TIME* and *Newsweek* were invited. But no Miami or Scripps-Howard papers were on the guest list, nor were any of the television networks.

Trouble. What was behind Castro’s sudden image-polishing? Washington’s Castrologists put it in a word: trouble. Though Castro remains in ironfisted control of his island, the economy is just barely bumping along, cut off from any real trade with the West and without enough help from Moscow to make a go of it. Abroad, Castro’s image has been severely tarnished by the spectacular defection of his sister Juanita (*TIME*, July 10). And next week the 20 foreign ministers of the Organization of American States will meet in Washington to vote on sanctions against Cuba for shipping arms to Communist terrorists in Venezuela. The prospect is for a clear two-thirds majority branding Castro an “aggressor.” The OAS is expected to ask all hemisphere nations to break their remaining economic ties with Cuba.

Aside from the New York Times, which thought that Fidel’s friendly new look “deserves serious scrutiny and thorough exploration,” the reaction was generally cool. The State Department regarded the Cuban overture as an attempt to buy time and take some of the steam out of the OAS, advised Castro to back his words with evidence. Said a spokesman: “We have consistently maintained that there are two elements that are not negotiable—Castro’s ties of dependency with the Soviet Union, which are tantamount to Soviet domination, and the continuance of Castro’s promotion of subversion elsewhere in the hemisphere.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES



EDER & CASTRO
Buying some time.