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Boycotts and Bribes

The United States Government's action in terminating aid programs to Great Britain, France and Yugoslavia as reprisal for their trade with Cuba is objectionable on grounds of both principle and practicality.

It is objectionable in principle because it suggests that our aid is based on a quid pro quo, that its purpose is to get the recipient countries to pursue policies friendly to us, that it constitutes a lever which we feel free to use for diplomatic purposes. It also is objectionable because it embraces the practices of the Communist countries which utilize trade to achieve political purposes. This step is going to confuse many of our friends who have agreed with us in the past that it is a bad thing to use aid and trade for political ends.

In practical terms, the policy is equally vulnerable. The amounts of these aid programs do not furnish us leverage that can be effectively employed to get a great nation to change its policies. If Great Britain could not be persuaded to adhere to the Cuban trade boycott by all the arguments available to us as a friend and ally, it is doubtful that it will be persuaded to abandon its principles by a bribe of less than \$100,000. A country that could be purchased in this manner would be beneath our contempt.

So the policy stands condemned on all grounds.

It is bad in principle and bad in practice and we ought to retreat from it as rapidly as we can do so. It is a policy that will hurt Cuba very little; it will hurt her suppliers hardly at all. It amounts to little more than a public admission that we are annoyed. It is inconsistent with our role as a great power thus openly to acknowledge our impotent rage.

Perhaps the action was intended only to show the people of the United States that the Administration is not soft on Cuba, that it is prepared to take extreme measures when required. There must be better ways to make that point. The action does not demonstrate that we are firm as much as it demonstrates that we are infirm—it does not show that we are strong; it shows that we are weak—so weak that we are ready to injure our best friends a little if only that injury will damage our worst enemy a little. This is a dangerous weakness in a great power. It exhibits an alarming subservience to sheer emotion and indignation.

The more we attempt to use aid and trade in this matter, the more we are going to find ourselves in conflict with the rest of the world. Opposition seems to make us cling to this discredited policy even more frantically. As our friends and allies, one by one, desert us, instead of looking about for means to club them into conformity, we might better re-examine the policy. It is a policy that can work only if it is pursued in concert with other powers and when that concert fails, there is no plausible alternative but to change the policy.

Cuba seems to cast some fatal spell upon our senses. We can be depended upon to act with blind rage and indignation whenever we touch our relations with that unfortunate and wretched island. Important as it is to restore the independence of Cuba, it is not so important that we should risk the loss of the friendship of our oldest allies in order to enforce a policy that at most will only irritate and that, in any case, will not destroy the regime in Cuba.