

Cuba Eyes Africa Link For Economic Benefits

By Michael Arkus

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HAVANA—Cuba is becoming increasingly aware of what has been called her "African vocation."

Isolated within the American hemisphere, the country's leaders are focusing their attention more on the African continent as a source of allies in a broad and active "anti-imperialist" front.

Some diplomatic observers here think Cuba may be considering a line of less direct identification with the Communist camp in order to play a top role in a more radical "third force" group of nations.

They believe leaders may also be encouraging the creation of a "third economic front." In this, underdeveloped countries producing raw materials would team up and impose better prices on the industrialized nations.

The revolutionary African countries would be of prime importance in any such plans.

The Hope That Failed

Until September, Cuba still hoped to break out of her isolation from Latin America with the possible victory of left-wing Chilean presidential candidate Salvador Allende.

Allende's defeat ended Cuba's hopes in the western hemisphere and the country's leaders began looking farther afield.

Early this year, a 10-week tour of the more revolutionary African countries was undertaken by Ernesto Guevara, Cuba's minister of industries.

The countries: Algeria, Mali,

Guinea, Ghana, Congo (Brazzaville), Tanzania and Egypt.

The message of his tour was clear: to create a common front of African, Asian and Latin American countries against colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Diplomatic observers here placed Guevara's visit within the present framework of the emerging nations, who lost their foremost spokesman with the death of the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Jockeying for Position

No one has yet risen to take Nehru's place, and Cuba, they felt, was making a bid for a front seat in a more radically orientated group of third-force nations.

The observers suggested that Premier Fidel Castro was also feeling the pinch of Cuba's great dependence on the Soviet Union without whose oil the nation's entire economy would grind to a halt.

Guevara may therefore have been investigating the future possibility of Algeria as an alternative source of oil.

As for the economic aspect of the tour, observers pointed to an Algiers newspaper interview with Guevara in which he emphasized that any common front "must be not only political but economic."

This, they said, was a clarion call for economic unity among the developing countries to impose good prices for their products. Cuba was in effect telling them that, if they banded together, they could collectively withhold all supplies until they received fair prices.