

*Post 7/17/64*

# Cuba Seeking Better Ties With U.S. To Lessen Dependence on Moscow

By Norman Gall

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HAVANA, July 16—Backed by the Soviet Union, Cuba is stepping up trade and diplomatic effort, to lessen the island's economic dependence on the Communist bloc and end the crippling U.S. trade embargo, which is depriving Cuba of badly needed industrial and consumer supplies.

Whether or not they find prompt favor in Washington, Premier Fidel Castro's current overtures for reduction of Cuban-United States tensions seem likely to undercut pressure on her allies to limit trade with Cuba.

Castro's offer to end material aid to Latin American revolutionaries, if the U.S. ends aid to Cuban "counter-revolutionaries," is an apparent effort to counter American arguments that the Castro regime is a continuing menace to hemispheric peace and therefore must be politically and economically isolated from the West.

The Cuban leader's proposal, moreover, amounts to a bid for U.S. recognition that Cuba's Marxist-Leninist regime is here to stay.

## Some Buses Arrive

On Wednesday morning the East German freighter Heinrich Heine steamed into Havana's drab harbor, past the ancient stone fortress of El Morro where thousands of political prisoners are kept and past the once-crowded

Malecon seaside boulevard where few cars pass these days, to unload the first 16 of 950 British-Leyland buses sold to Cuba for \$30 million earlier this year.

The arrival of the buses, painted gaily in orange, turquoise and green, is being attended with great publicity here for the benefit of Havana riders who have been crammed in recent years into small Czechoslovakian buses, ill-suited to the tropical heat, and pre-revolutionary General

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Motors models, both of which are eternally breaking down.

What has gotten little publicity, especially in the U.S., has been the intensity and apparent success of Cuba's diplomatic drive to establish cordial if not friendly relations with allies of the U.S. as well as the Roman Catholic Church.

## Others Seek Contract

Castro has attended virtually every major diplomatic reception offered at Western embassies during the past several months, though he bothers to attend fewer Communist bloc functions. He has made peace with the Roman Catholic Church with the help of the Vatican's able diplomatic representative, Msgr. Cesar Zacchi, and in recent weeks the first foreign priests

entered Cuba since the 1961 expulsion of 130 of them.

What is little known in the British bus deal, which caused a minor tempest in Anglo-American relations, is that bidding for the same contract were manufacturers' representatives from France, Italy and West Germany as well as Czechoslovakia. While the Cuban government does not publish foreign trade statistics, some Western commercial attaches estimate that Cuba's purchases from the West are approaching one-third of her imports, compared with 10 percent two years ago.

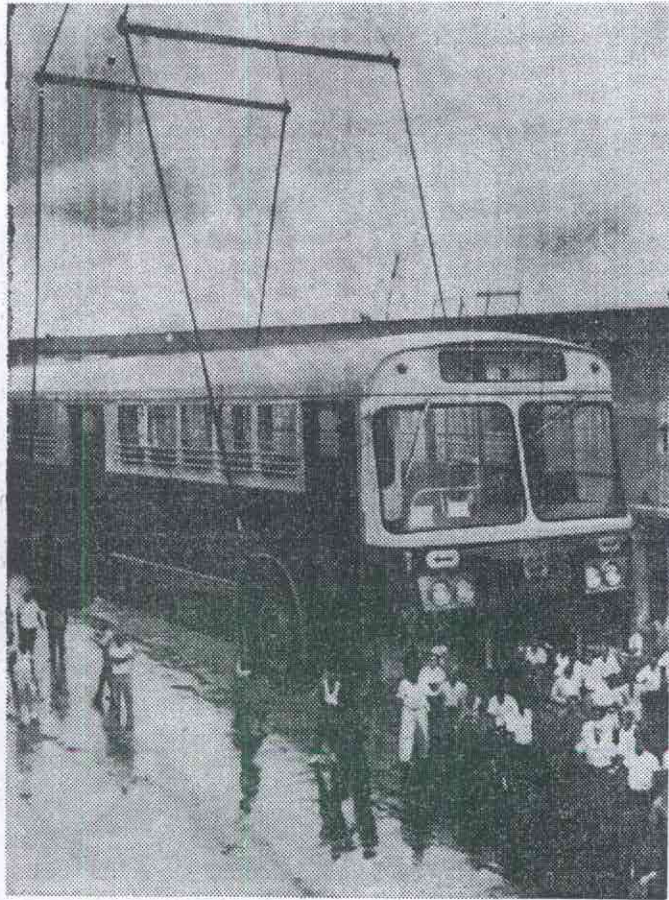
In his Jan. 2 speech celebrating the revolution's fifth anniversary in power, Castro spoke of trading with "countries whose economies are complementary to ours—like Japan for example." Japan this year has set up two exported factories in Cuba and is selling ships and chemicals to the Castro regime after purchasing sugar from Cuba.

## Soviet Encourages Trade

Canada is selling Cuba wheat, fertilizer, cattle, medicine, chemical products and food. France is selling locomotives, trucks, construction equipment and drugs. Spain provides food, ships, motors, chemicals, and weekly flights by Iberia Airlines to Madrid. Italy has set up a fertilizer plant and is selling other chemicals.

The trade with the West is

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United Press International

The first of 950 English buses is unloaded at Havana.

## Improved U.S. Ties Are Sought by Cuba

still small but it is being encouraged by the Soviet Union, which has relinquished a large part of its quota of Cuban sugar to allow the Castro regime to capitalize on high world prices. There is no more talk in Havana of Cuba bearing the sugar-producing share in "the socialist division of labor" enunciated in 1962 by Minister of Industries Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

Castro's latest bid for improved relations with Washington, in a New York Times interview two weeks ago, was promptly cheered by the Russian press. Castro is understood to have decided to reduce his dependence on the Eastern bloc following the October, 1962, missile crisis, sending trade missions to Western Europe in the spring of 1963.

At the same time, the Chinese press and diplomacy have been constantly warning Cuba of a Russian betrayal in the interests of Soviet-American understanding.

"If after five and a half years Fidel can remain Communist and become respectable, this would be a terrible blow for the Alliance for Progress," one high-ranking Western diplomat told me a few days ago. Yet this is precisely the challenge the Cuban revolution — boasting major achievements in health and education despite grinding scarcities in food and other consumer goods—in now posing to American foreign policy.

"I served in Czechoslovakia right after the 1948 Communist coup," said another Western diplomat. "The Czech Communists didn't have 5 per cent of the population with them and they had no trouble staying in power. Castro has many enemies here but he has much more than 5 per cent support. If it were not for the food shortages he would be supported by an overwhelming majority."

Castro's campaign to enlist

support of the allies of the U.S. and possibly even the Vatican to break the American trade embargo is still gaining momentum. His invitation to more than twenty American newspapers to send correspondents to the July 26th celebration in Santiago next week may be the start of a new phase of this drive.

He has been saying recently that "it is better that the American press report 10 per cent of the truth about Cuba from inside than all propaganda from outside."

The "exportation" of revolution and counter-revolution has been a double-edged issue. While exile attacks on sugar mills, for example, have caused minor economic damage, they have been used by the Castro regime to excite nationalistic frenzy and as an excuse to crack down on internal dissidents.

The U.S. equally has been using the Castro threat of exportation of revolution to Latin

America as its chief argument to seek further sanctions against Cuba. But Castro's principal revolutionary export, the terrorism and guerrilla warfare in Venezuela, stopped last December after failing to provoke a military coup. There are few signs elsewhere in Latin America today of this revolutionary export activity.

Relaxation of American pressure on Cuba, either in the form of creating fewer difficulties for the allies in trading or in resuming U.S. sales of food and medicine to Cuba that were suspended earlier this year, would do much to increase Castro's prestige at home.

Availability of American spare parts alone would keep in use much of Cuba's industrial plant, which otherwise would have to be abandoned.

The big question is how long can the U.S. keep the pressure on in the face of Castro's "peace offensive."

Castro is waging his campaign of being sweet and reasonable in a season when he knows that President Johnson, because of electoral pressures, must be an implacable foe of Cuba and communism.