

POST # 124/64
Offer From Havana

Several obvious points can be made about Fidel Castro's uncharacteristic new offer to the United States. The Cuban Premier has indicated that his government would halt help to revolutionary movements elsewhere if the United States would also pledge an end to assistance to exile groups seeking Dr. Castro's overthrow. Moreover, he hints, in an interview with a *New York Times* correspondent, that he would favor compensating those North Americans whose property was seized by the Cuban regime.

First of all, newspaper interviews are not the normal channel of diplomacy. Clearly, the Cuban is appealing over the head of this Government to world opinion. One reason why he might be interested in presenting a more conciliatory face is that on July 21 hemisphere foreign ministers will meet to consider stiffening the sanctions against the Cuban regime.

Secondly, Dr. Castro is in desperate need of relief for a mismanaged economy that has been hurt by trade embargo. Normalization of relations with the United States would put the seal of legitimacy on the Cuban Communist regime and open the way for a resumption of vitally needed trade in Cuba's natural markets in this hemisphere.

Yet, having said this, it must be added that irregular means of diplomacy have become the rule in dealing with Dr. Castro, since there are few points of direct contact. Additionally, the very conciliatory tone that Cuba adopts is a vindication of United States policies intended to force the island to reconsider a hostile and artificial relationship with the Soviet camp.

Political realities in this country make it unlikely that there could be any new tack in Cuban policy until the November election is over. Yet in the meantime it would be a mistake, in our opinion, to dismiss all Cuban conciliatory gestures out of hand. Surely any step to moderation in Havana should be welcomed. A country which is urging others to resolve disputes by peaceful means should not reject negotiations when its own interests are at stake.

The chief difficulty is that there is hardly any ground for mutual trust between Cuba and the United States. Dr. Castro cannot forget the Bay of Pigs; this country will never forget the missile crisis. In the near future, therefore, there is an opportunity to see if Castro is simply playing a propaganda game or whether he is in earnest. Cuba could take some steps of its own that would make Castro's fine words more credible.

Whatever happens, it would be a mistake to imitate precisely what we deplore in Fidel Castro—dogmatic self-righteousness. The proper response to the Cuban initiative ought to be a willingness to hear more while keeping the powder dry.