

Castro's Secret Of Success

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London—Whatever happened to Fidel Castro? Whatever it was, it certainly wasn't what seven western hemisphere Presidents (including John F. Kennedy) predicted four years ago.

Alarmed at the prospect of Soviet-Cuban subversion of Central America, the seven heads of state met in Costa Rica to pledge themselves to countermeasures.

It was then, in a 2,000 word declaration of Central America, that they foresaw that Castro's regime would soon fall.

Yet, despite the enmity of the U. S. and adjacent nations, despite tiffs with Russia and verbal brawls with Mao's China, Castro is still in the Cuban saddle.

What makes Fidel run?

The answer is that he is a consummate politician.

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Despite what cynics say, the trouble with most politicians is consistency. They make a virtue of it. They attach themselves to some "ism" or other and spend the remainder of their public lives propagating and defending it.

Castro, on the other hand, like the sapling that outweathers the massive oak, has made flexibility his virtue.

Right from the start he has cast himself in whatever part it has been most profitable to seem to be.

There was a time—embarrassing though this be to recall—when Castro was really quite a pet on the Potomac. In those days it was profitable in Washington to appear to be a clean-limbed young nationalist, pure in thought, word and deed.

Washington's good opinion was important to the young lawyer turned revolutionary and there was not the wariest whisper of leftist leanings. On the contrary, much was made of his Jesuit education and—nice touch—his moderate Catholicism.

By the end of 1961 the serious and devout Catholic was declaring: "I am a Marxist-Leninist until I die."

Nine months later, for a few bowstring days, the world teetered on the brink of war. Kennedy had incontrovertible proof that the Russians had set up rocket sites in Cuba.

It was get out or else. The Russians got out.

Castro made face-saving noises. The rockets were Russian property, not his.

Once more Fidel was non-aligned. But only until he delightedly discovered that Mao thought that Khrushchev was a Russian chicken and was publicly using words like "Munich" and "appeasement" to describe the Soviet climb-down.

So Fidel became a Peking Communist.

It was a consummate piece of political coquetry. And the Russians fell for it.

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Within six months Castro was being feted in Moscow, where the Russians set about soothing his injured feelings with bigger and better aid and credit.

In no time at all Fidel was accusing the Chinese of having let him down over rice deliveries.

Something else was working for Fidel. The October '62 crisis had cost America a lot of support in its squabble with Cuba. They had been just too cavalier in bringing the world to the brink of war. One result was the insistence of several large trading powers on dealing with Cuba regardless of American feelings, thus making nonsense of the American blockade.

Now America is noticeably cooler toward anti-Castro exiles in its midst. Now Fidel is being blandly delighted to come along and mix with capitalists at Expo 67.

Whatever happened to Fidel Castro?

Didn't you know? He won.

