

Von Hoffman

The Cuban Threat

Washington

EL PRESIDENTE Geraldo Ford dropped in on Puerto Rico the other day and the first thing he did was to tell El Jefe Supremo, Fidel Castro, to keep his cotton-pickers off that island. If Ronald Reagan had said it everybody would be yapping about how irresponsible he is.

The Cuban threat is a geopolitical version of the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. Here is an island nation that's about 760 miles long, 50

miles thick with 8.5 million people, and to listen to American officialdom you'd think that this small gang of stogie puffers are about to conquer the world. When they're not subverting Puerto Rico we're warning them of Panama, Angola or Rhodesia. Where do they get all the troops for these escapades? Russian volunteers and left-wing Hollywood starlets who missed the charter



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flight when the Venceremos Brigade went home to Pasadena?

No man and no country in the world is as adept at getting the American government's goat as Castro and Cuba. We rise to the bait every time and we do it with such unvarying consistency that Castro plants rumors of new Cuban subversions in unlikely places as a pastime. Don't be surprised to read that Kissinger has warned the Maximum Leader of Cuban socialism to stop fomenting civil war in Lebanon.

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IN THE last few years saner heads in Washington have begun to question this ceaseless and pointless vendetta against our Caribbean neighbor. Why, they want to know, do we continue to try to embargo and starve the Cubans 18 years after their revolution? We did the same with the Russians and with the Chinese only to give it up and admit we'd made idiots of ourselves.

Given the history of U.S.-Cuban relations, it's they who have every moral right to be attempting to quarantine us. Cuba might be considered the first country in which the United States tried out what is now called neo-colonialism; that is, having ostensibly free and independent states which are in reality run by an invisible American proconsul.

Under an intervention clause of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish-American war, we thrice sent troops into the country. The worst was in 1906 when we sent a certain Charles Magoon of Nebraska to be the governor of Cuba. The indignity of it! To be ruled over by a man named Magoon. In the America of 1906 or now such as a Magoon should aspire to nothing higher than saloon keeper or alderman.

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THE AMERICAN penetration and domination of the Cuban economy left the little island in a condition of near vassalage. A U.S. Department of Commerce publication in 1956 made the point better than any Marxist-Leninist could: "American participation exceeds 90 per cent in the telephone and electric services, about 50 per cent in public service railways and roughly 50 per cent in raw sugar production. The Cuban branches of the United States banks are entrusted with almost one-fourth of all bank deposits."

That by no means exhausts the catalogue of American ownership and control. The mining interests were American and so were the tourist hotels, the dope peddling and prostitution. By the time Castro came to power we'd turned Cuban men into busboys and pimps and Cuban women into whores. No revolution could take over in such a situation without confiscation of foreign investments. We Americans ought to understand that, given the national freakout at the publication of the mere possibility that the Arabs might buy a chunk of one of our better-known, near-bankrupt airlines.

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THE AMERICAN policy has been anything but empathetic. While playing down the actual history of the relations between the two countries, in public Castro has been denominated a bandit, and in secret the scum of the Mafia were sworn into the CIA and told if their hit men scored on the Cuban leader they could have their whore houses back.

If our Presidente should decide to return to the Caribbean, next time he might forego the threats and offer El Jefe Supremo our apologies with a promise not to do it again.