

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1970

Letters to the Editor

When U.S. Ended Cuban Sugar Quota

To the Editor:

Paul Bethel in a letter published Dec. 19, commented on an earlier one from Cole Blasier, Director of the Center for Latin-American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Both letters, though primarily devoted to conditions and prospects in Chile, deal also with the suspension of the Cuban sugar quota by President Eisenhower in July of 1960.

I was American Ambassador in Havana at the time and have just completed a book on Cuban-American relations to be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press next fall.

Mr. Bethel justifies the President's action on the ground that the Castro-Mikoyan sugar deal in February of that year indicated that Castro had begun "shifting his market to the Soviets" and hence away from the United States.

But in fact the sale to the Russians involved a million metric tons annually with payment for the first year to be slightly below the world price and with 80 per cent in Russian goods. The price (2.78 cents per pound) was two cents less than what Cuba was getting for the three million tons of sugar normally exported to the United States.

In Batista's time the Russians had

in several years bought hundreds of thousands of tons of Cuban sugar on terms relatively better for Cuba than those Vice Premier Anastas Mikoyan had exacted.

Though Castro surely wished to increase his sales to the Soviet Union, his deal with Russia was not in itself a threat to the availability of Cuban sugar for the American market. I do not believe the Russians would at that time have promised their cooperation for Castro initiatives to reduce the amount of Cuban sugar exportable to the United States.

The suspension of the balance of the Cuban quota by the President in July, however, carried with it the implication that the United States would buy no more Cuban sugar as long as Castro was in power.

Moscow was now confronted with a choice of either arranging to buy (with help from other Communist countries) sugar from Cuba in quantities and on premium terms equivalent to the former American takings or of allowing an anti-American, "anti-imperialist" revolution to perish from economic strangulation.

The American initiative drove the probably reluctant Russians into Castro's welcoming arms. In terms both of principle and expediency I be-

lieve this action was regrettable. I opposed it unsuccessfully.

Letters to the Editor gain in enlightenment if the reader is aware of the writer's current involvement with his subject. Paul Bethel identifies himself as press attaché at the Embassy in Havana from 1958 to 1961. He is at present Executive Director of "Citizens Committee for a Free Cuba, Inc." and editor of that organization's "Latin-American Report," a publication that gives the impression of advocating the use of American armed force to destroy the Castro regime.

I strongly dissent and am confident this position is held today by few thinking Americans even among those who embraced it in earlier years. In the absence of conditions equivalent to those that led to the missile crisis of 1962 American policy toward Cuba should remain substantially as it has been since the resolution of that crisis.

The Castro regime with its suppression of human freedoms and its capricious personal dictatorship is alien to the character and unworthy of the potential for self-government of the Cuban people. Castro's fully demonstrated economic incompetence may well hasten his end.

But the Cuba of the future must be primarily the creation of Cubans living in Cuba.

PHILIP W. BONSAI
Washington, Dec. 20, 1970

SEE 28 JAN 71