

NYTimes

APR 29 1974

Washington's Futile Policy Toward

By Henry Raymont

WASHINGTON—The Nixon Administration's recalcitrant reaction to the planned sale to Cuba of motor vehicles manufactured by United States-owned companies in Argentina has more than cast a pall on the "new spirit" in hemispheric relations recently proclaimed by Secretary of State Kissinger.

None of the Administration's professed foreign policy assumptions—a lower profile, and a world of ideological pluralism, consensus and the reduction of differences with former adversaries—seem to apply when it comes to Cuba.

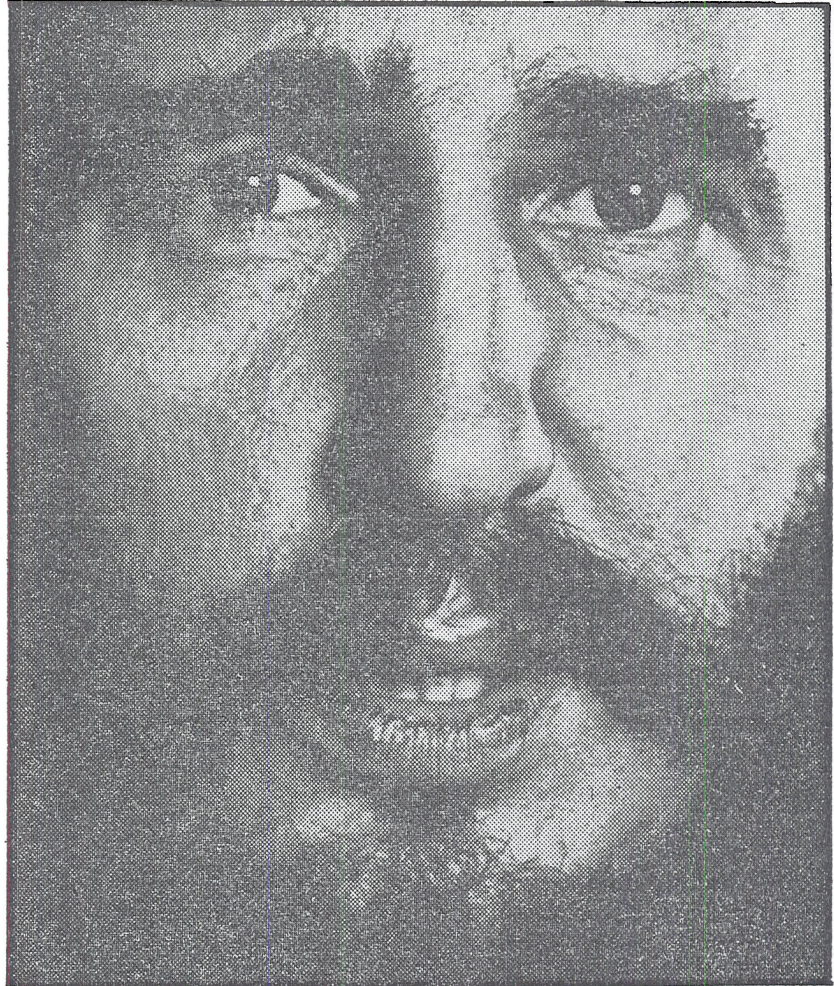
Moreover, by having insisted until April 18 on adherence to an obsolescent 13-year-old embargo on trade with Havana, Washington has succeeded in reviving an issue most Latin-American governments have been eager to forget and jeopardizing relations with Argentina, one of the hemisphere's most important countries.

Even though the White House finally followed Mr. Kissinger's reported advice and found a technical loophole to permit the companies—Ford, General Motors and Chrysler—to participate in the \$1.2-billion, five-year deal Argentina signed with Cuba last fall, the diplomatic damage caused by the delay is already considerable.

In lifting the trade embargo in this matter, the State Department said it would issue export licenses allowing Argentine subsidiaries of the three concerns to sell about \$145 million worth of cars and trucks to Cuba after Argentina threatened to nationalize the companies if they did not sell the vehicles.

The diplomatic damage focused on the fascinating subject of how foreign corporations operate in developing nations—whether they are guided by local considerations or, if put to the test, will abide only by their headquarters' decisions, presumably subject to the interests of the industrial powers.

Second, it stirred new interest in the Cuban issue, dormant since the downfall of Premier Fidel Castro's major



Sven Simon/Black Star

ally, President Salvador Allende Gossens of Chile, last September, in a new context of Latin-American solidarity that makes it most difficult for Argentina's friends to ignore.

Third, it provided the bizarre spectacle of a major South American government that had little interest or inclination to espouse the Cuban cause being predictably provoked into militant advocacy of Mr. Castro's reintegration into the Latin-American family—if only to serve notice to Washington that no South American republic likes to feel its sovereign rights to trade abroad are being jeopardized by U.S. policy considerations.

The logic of Washington's response to the Argentine deal is all the more baffling considering the remarkable change, President Juan D. Perón has brought to his country's relations with the United States, reversing the strident anti-United States policy of the regime of his predecessor, Dr. Héctor J. Cámpora, and removing from the Government radical leftists in order to pursue a policy of moderate nationalism and conservatism that would attract foreign investments.

An upsurge of leftist and ultranationalist criticism against the conciliatory course toward Washington was held in check by Mr. Perón's as-

Havana

sertive policy of trading with any nation regardless of its ideology. However, when Washington's opposition to the sale of Argentine vehicles to Cuba became evident, the criticism gained new strength with the argument that a policy of confrontation was more likely to win concessions than any attempt at collaboration.

Nonetheless, in mid-January, Foreign Minister Alberto J. Vignes told me that Argentina had no particular reason to raise the Cuban question at the inter-American conference of foreign ministers in Mexico a few weeks later. Indeed, he scrupulously confined Argentina's representations over the refusal to allow the Argentine subsidiaries to participate in the Cuban sale, and its domestic implications, to two private meetings with Mr. Kissinger. "I shall do my very best to help you," Mr. Kissinger was quoted as having told him.

Argentine restraint gave way to a militant campaign for broad discussion of the Cuban question, and Argentine officials missed no opportunity to publicly denounce the continued isolation of Cuba, while privately blaming Washington for having pushed them into that position.

Many times Washington has readily sacrificed its relations with South America because of an obsession with the Castro regime. It is difficult to understand why this attitude should prevail now that Cuba's geopolitical influence in the Western Hemisphere has been sharply reduced by Soviet-United States détente, and six Latin-American and Caribbean nations have joined Mexico in defying the diplomatic boycott of Havana.

The futility of clinging to a policy of isolation was further underscored in recent weeks by Canada's sale to Cuba of locomotives manufactured by United States-controlled companies, and visits to Havana by papal representatives, by Latin-American trade missions and by Foreign Minister Emilio O. Rabasa of Mexico.

Henry Raymond writes for the Rio de Janeiro paper Jornal do Brasil.