

## Cuba a Live Issue In Capital Again After Five Years

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WASHINGTON, May 5 — Americans influential in the national policy-making process have begun to debate the issue of relation with Cuba after a lapse of more than five years.

Although leading officials of the Nixon Administration insist that no change is imminent in the United States policy of boycott toward the island, some officials comment that the mere emergence of the debate signifies an important change, whose end point—while still a long stretch down the road—could be resumption of relations.

On the surface, the new debate has been sparked by two Administration decisions favorable to Cuba, which were announced by the State Department April 18.

The first was to license American subsidiaries of three major motor vehicle companies in Argentina to export cars and trucks to Cuba. The second was Secretary of State Kissinger's acquiescence to demands of Latin-American and Caribbean foreign ministers to a vote among the members of the Organization of American States to determine whether Cuba should be invited to par-

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ticipate in the next round of the "new hemisphere dialogue" inaugurated by the Administration last year.

The debate has received an added fillip from a request by members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and four Congressmen for a "new look" at the United States policy toward Cuba.

However, Administration officials say the real impetus for the debate comes from the United States decision to cultivate Latin-American and Caribbean neighbors, following five years of neglect. This has automatically revived the question of Cuba—so near geographically to the United States and so far away in terms of political orientation since the Bay of Pigs disaster and Soviet crisis of the early nineteen-sixties.

The issue has also drawn attention because five years of administration détente policy—involving principally the Soviet Union and China—have left only Cuba, Albania and Mongolia on the fringes. Again, Cuba attracts more interest because of proximity to the United States.

Recently President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger have been criticized—by Argentina, for instance—on the premise that the United States has sacrificed a constructive policy toward Latin America as a whole to its rigid stance on Cuba.

### U.S. Stance Softened

Mr. Kissinger has told his aides he believes just the reverse is true, that the Administration is so earnest about developing constructive relations with Latin America that it does not want the Cuba issue to impede "the new hemisphere dialogue." For this reason, he softened the United States stance on those aspects of Cuban policy affecting other Latin-American countries.

But he is strictly limiting further movement toward an eventual understanding with Cuba in the belief this would better suit the development of consensus in the hemisphere on the Cuban question.

Mr. Kissinger has told his aides that he believes that Administration approval of licenses for the Argentine subsidiaries to export to Cuba, and consideration of Cuba as a potential partner in "the new hemisphere dialogue" of foreign ministers represent sacrifice of the rigid stance on Cuba to the prospect of improved ties with the other Latin-American states.

He is also said to believe these decisions have bought time for the United States, perhaps 11 months, before new Latin-American pressure on the issue of Cuba must be faced.

Mr. Kissinger's conviction on this matter was reinforced by the behavior of 23 Latin-American and Caribbean countries at the Organization of American States General Assembly in Atlanta, which came to an end Wednesday.

Cuba's proponents, notably Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Vene-

zuela and Colombia, made only perfunctory statements asking a reconsideration of the organization's 12-year-old political boycott and 10-year-old economic embargo against the Government of Premier Fidel Castro.

"Kissinger's success in his dialogue with the foreign ministers beforehand drew the breath out of the O.A.S. meeting," and aide said.

As assessed by Mr. Kissinger and his specialists, there are large obstacles to be overcome before Washington and Havana could begin a direct dialogue on improving relations. These include the following:

¶Premier Castro's seemingly implacable hostility toward the United States, particularly toward the Nixon Administration. Although Washington believes the Castro leadership is no longer fomenting revolution in Latin America on a grand scale, Havana remains an "enemy" in the official view, to the extent that Foreign Minister Raúl Roa could go before the United Nations General Assembly last week and accuse the Administration of "filthy policies of economic blockade."

¶Influential Cuban exiles and numerous conservative legislators, including at least 34 Senators, who would oppose an early rapprochement between the United States and Cuba.

¶Remaining conservative governments in Latin America that would be frightened by United States acceptance of Castro Communism—chiefly Brazil, Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia and Ecuador.

¶The Administration perception that to take up ties now with the Castro Government would be to strengthen the impression that President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger prefer dealing with enemies to dealing with friends, and also an impression that the way to get something out of the United States is to pull Uncle Sam's beard.

### Little Gain or Loss Now

For the present, Administration officials see neither great gain nor great loss in seeking better relations with the Castro leadership, and some think nothing substantive could take place until Mr. Nixon's successor is in office.

"It is an interesting market despite its small size," a State Department official observed. "And after the deprivations of 15 years it could use a lot. But what are they going to pay with?"

"The main thing to gain would be symbolic, of having put the past behind us," he remarked.

Nonetheless, this official and others have begun to envision a scenario in which Havana and Washington would eventually come to terms.

As they see it, the change would have to be brought about by the Castro Government through political gestures such as amnesty for some of Cuba's several thousand political prisoners, hundreds of whom have languished in island prison camps for 14 or more years.

"After all, when you think of détente, I think we have changed more than the Cubans," a United States official said. "The Cubans have modified the revolutionary impulse only because they had to."

In the Administration view, the rapprochement would require the mediation of a country that has close ties with both Cuba and the United States. At the moment, only Mexico, Peru and Algeria qualify for that role.

Also, the Castro Government is reported to be willing to meet "constructively" with the hemisphere foreign ministers as a participant in "the new hemisphere dialogue" in Buenos Aires next March. This could pave the way for a direct Havana-Washington dialogue, say United States officials, although they are not enthusiastic at this time about Cuban participation at Buenos Aires.

One part of the puzzle that still does not fit the considerations of the Administration officials is the role played by the Soviet Union, which is extending \$500-million in assistance to Cuba annually, according to the estimates here.

Some officials believe the Soviet Union enjoys the spectacle of the United States being discredited in its renewed efforts to cultivate its southern hemisphere neighbors by the continuing United States-Cuban hostility. But these same officials note that the Soviet Communist party chief, Leonid I. Brezhnev, on his visit to Havana early this year, urged moderation on Mr. Castro. They wonder how long "embarrassment" of the United States might be worth half a billion dollars a year to Moscow.