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Who Shall Govern in Cuba?

To the Editor:

In a Dec. 19 letter I said the U.S. cut its sugar quota to Cuba because Castro was shifting his market to the Soviets. Philip W. Bonsal, last U.S. Ambassador to Cuba, disagrees [letter Dec. 29] and asserts that the sugar cut was a warning that no more purchases would be made as "long as Castro was in power."

I question this version of policy.

No thinking official imagined for a moment that Castro would step down in the face of such a "warning." Nor did anyone know of a leader in Cuba equipped to challenge Castro.

My point was not that the barter deal between the U.S.S.R. and Castro back in February of 1960 would leave the U.S. without sugar but that Castro's march into the Communist camp called for drastic action.

The cancellation of Cuba's sugar quota was intended to show Castro's internal enemies (who had begun intensive sabotage by that time) that they could count on us. This was accompanied with material assistance given to the anti-Castro underground.

It appears to me that Mr. Bonsal ascribed to the U.S. sugar quota a diplomatic leverage which did not exist. In March 1960, Ché Guevara virtually invited the U.S. to cancel the quota, saying that it "merely served to enslave the Cuban people." If the Cubans were "enslaved" by receiving from the U.S. 5.11 cents a pound for 3½ million tons of sugar each year,

did it follow that the Soviets "liberated" them by paying 2.78 cents a pound (in barter) for a million tons?

Therefore, I cannot possibly agree with Mr. Bonsal's conclusion that it was "American initiative" in cutting Cuba's sugar quota at the late date of July 1960 that "drove the probably reluctant Russians" into an alliance with Fidel Castro. For a full eighteen months, the Soviet-directed party in Cuba worked hand-in-glove with Castro's "new" Communists in capturing labor and the press and eliminating opposition. Thus, a practical alliance had been formed by the traditional base of power as far back as February 1960, when the Soviet-Cuban pact was signed.

I wrote on the basis of my experience (1958-61) as press attaché in Cuba. (Mr. Bonsal, by the way, had an unusually brief accreditation, March 5, 1959, to Oct. 28, 1960.) I do not advocate rushing U.S. troops to overthrow Cuba, as Mr. Bonsal implies, and my present position with the U.S. Citizens Committee for a Free Cuba is not pertinent to what happened a decade ago.

I agree with Mr. Bonsal that the future of Cuba belongs to those living there. The question is which Cubans—the hundreds of thousands patiently sabotaging the Communist economy, or, as Mr. Bonsal's sympathies imply, the same Government shorn of Castro?

PAUL BETHEL
Miami, Dec. 31, 1970

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