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A New, Different Cuba

By Herbert L. Matthews

LONDON—The mountains are moving to Mohammed. Without Premier Fidel Castro's having to take a step, most of Latin America is going his way and pressures are building up in the United States for a change in policy toward Cuba.

The replacement of Richard M. Nixon by a new President; the force of Latin American opinion; the changed attitude toward international Communism; the worldwide economic crisis, and a greatly improved Cuban situation all signal the approaching end of the island's isolation in the hemisphere.

Neither Mr. Castro nor Cuba needs an end to the American trade embargo, although it would certainly help. Fidel is in no hurry. One statistic would in itself be enough although there are others. The price of sugar on the London (which is to say, the world) market as the week of Sept. 2-6 ended was 42 cents a pound. Three years ago it was 6 to 8 cents. Seven years ago it was 2½ cents.

The sugar harvest that has just ended was an excellent one, despite a serious drought from November to April. The crop will be higher than last year's satisfying 5.4 million tons, because of mechanization, scientific management and more efficient policies. There were only 180,000 sugar workers for the 1974 harvest, compared to a pre-1959 average of 450,000. Of this harvest, 2,160,000 tons will be sold at world market prices, even to China. The Soviet Union has a long-term contract for most of the rest at 20 cents a pound, which is a good price when one considers the huge Soviet contribution to the Cuban economy. Japan is taking a million tons a year at world prices and would like more.

Exports of fish, nickel, citrus fruits, tobacco and some beef are all bringing in high returns from hard currency countries.

Except for the hard-nosed military dictatorships of Chile, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, Latin America is now virtually demanding a change in the Cuban policy of the Organization of American States. It is more than likely that when the foreign ministers of the Organization of American States meet in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in March, 1975, Cuba will be invited back into the fold.

It seems to have been forgotten in the United States that the technical reason for Cuba's expulsion from the O.A.S. in 1962 was that its Marxist-Leninist Government was "incompatible with the inter-American system" and not because Fidel Castro was try-

ing to foster revolutions in Latin America. The official reason no longer makes sense and Mr. Castro is doing very little to stir up revolutions in the hemisphere.

On Aug. 27, 1971, in a speech at Havana University, he said: "There aren't any words in the dictionary with which we can state more clearly that Cuba will never return to that filth, that trash, that rotting corpse" of the O.A.S. which, he added on another occasion, "makes us vomit."

Statesmen should never say never. Fidel Castro is eminently pragmatic and practical, and he has changed his mind before, but the move must come from the O.A.S., just as any conciliatory move with the United States either must come from Washington or be made to appear mutual.

Cubans do not seem to expect developments before the March O.A.S. meeting, and certainly not before the November elections in the United States. The negotiations with Washington figure to be long and intricate. American properties valued at some \$1.5 billion were expropriated. They could not be returned in their original form, for the eggs have been thoroughly scrambled and all properties anyway now belong to the state. So long as there is a Marxist-Leninist Government in Cuba—which is to say for the foreseeable future—there will be no private industries or properties in Cuba. There could be a financial agreement of sorts with the United States as there was with Mexico over the nationalization of the oil industry.

Cuba is now trading with every developed country in the world. Her credit rating is high. There has been far greater progress than in any Latin American country in education, public health and social services. The regime has never been more popular and it has a powerful military and police structure to back it up.

Mr. Castro has a totalitarian regime, but he is beginning to decentralize and institutionalize. Secret popular elections for "organs of people's power" were held in Matanzas Province last month. If the experiment is successful, there will be national elections in time for "all production and service units that serve the community at the grass roots," as Fidel Castro put it.

The Cuba with which Washington broke relations twelve years ago no longer exists. The United States and Latin America must now negotiate with a new, different and far stronger Cuba.

*Herbert L. Matthews, a former New York Times correspondent and editorial writer, is now retired.*