



Cuba is now in the process of mechanizing the entire sugar-cane cutting operation with help from Russia.

Gaining ground without OAS

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HAVANA

THE CONSENSUS among foreign observers here is that Cuba has strengthened its foreign policy positions considerably in the past year, in spite of the continued economic embargo of the Organization of American States. (An OAS meeting in Quito, Ecuador in November failed again to get the embargo lifted.) The Cubans, however, seemed unruffled by all this.

They don't deny that a vote to eliminate the sanctions placed on Cuba more than a decade ago would have been an important one—recognition, finally, that the Cuban revolution is here to stay and that the diplomatic and commercial embargo has been a dismal failure. But Cuban officials say that even the "no-vote" at Quito proves the embargo has, in fact, become more and more of an illusion.

The Cubans point out that most votes on the embargo resolution at Quito were cast in favor of dropping the embargo, 12 out of the 21 nations present, but the resolution failed to get the required two-thirds vote.

The basis for the Cuban government belief that even the no-vote at Quito favors them is not hard to find. It has been expressed by Fidel Castro many times in speeches and interviews. Castro is convinced that the tide has turned in Latin America and that whether the OAS likes it or not, Cuba is neither isolated nor seriously hurt by the embargo.

Cuba's trade with the non-socialist bloc has reached new levels. These are a few of the post-Quito indicators:

- A British trade delegation has visited Cuba to lay the groundwork for an expansion of trade between the two countries.
- The Export Development Corp. of Canada has floated a loan of about \$24-million for Cuba to buy three merchant ships to be constructed by Marine Industries Ltd. of Sorel, Que.
- Thirty Japanese banks and industrial concerns have formed a special association to stimulate increased trade with Cuba. In 1974 Japan bought one million tons of Cuban crude sugar, about 20 per cent of Cuba's total production.
- A Mexican delegation of 82 government trade official and industrial representatives has visited Cuba and concluded contracts for \$40-million worth of sales to Cuba. In March 1975, the Mexican Institute for Foreign Trade will organize an industrial and agricultural fair in Havana in which 250 Mexican enterprises will be represented.

Spain and Cuba have signed a three-year accord which has been heralded as "the most important in the history of relations between the two countries." Under the agreement Spain will finance

Cuban purchases to the tune of \$900-million.

- Cuba has announced that 32 cargo ships are being built for it in Finland, Sweden, Spain, Western Germany and Norway, in addition to the three being built in Canada.

- The first fruits of the \$1.2-billion Argentine loan concluded earlier this year have become evident in Cuba. Argentine Fiat, Dodge and Chevrolets, some of the 35,000 purchased, have rolled away from Havana docks.

These are just a few of the examples that Cuban officials give to show that the embargo against Cuba is largely a fiction. A high Canadian trade official said here that Cuba's credit rating is going up even farther as a result of the high price crude sugar is bringing on the world market.

Malcolm Bow, Canadian Ambassador in Cuba, zeroed in specifically on Canadian-Cuban trade relations: "Cuba represents an opportunity for a breakthrough in the diversification of Canadian export markets. In addition to our traditional sales of agricultural and primary products, we are now selling ships, diesel locomotives, complete processing plants and a wide range of manufactured goods."

No evaluation of Cuba's economic condition would be complete without taking into account the help rendered by the socialist bloc and especially the Soviet Union.

That bid has really been monumental, everything from food to tractors to modern weapons.

The Soviet Union is helping Cubans to build power plants and to renovate the railroads and sugar mills. Russian and Cuban technicians worked together to solve the thorny problem of a mechanical sugar cane cutter, which is already being widely used. The first models were produced in the Soviet Union and now a factory in Cuba will manufacture them. Now the Soviet Union will provide Cuba with two nuclear power plants of 440,000 kilowatts each that should be operational sometime in the early nineteen eighties.

The Cubans have built up a tremendous debt to the Soviet Union over the years. Repayment, however, has been postponed until 1985 and there is speculation that at that time, the Russians might decide to cancel at least a part of the debt.

Another key indicator for gauging the ineffectiveness of the embargo policy is the formal diplomatic relations between Cuba and other countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Mexico, a member of the OAS, has never gone along with the embargo and has maintained normal diplomatic relations with Cuba right through the nine-

teen sixties and still continues to do so. Canada is the only other country in the hemisphere that can claim the same distinction, a reason for which Malcolm Bow says "we have earned great respect and goodwill in Cuba."

Chile, under President Salvador Allende, established diplomatic relations with Cuba in defiance of the OAS embargo but these came to an abrupt end when Allende was overthrown by a military coup. It was not surprising that the present Chilean government was one of the most rabid opponents of ending the embargo against Cuba at Quito, one of the three nations that voted against the resolution.

Over the past few years, a number of Latin American nations have established diplomatic relations with Cuba. Among them are four Spanish-speaking nations: Peru, Argentina, Panama and just last week Venezuela. Four English-speaking nations of the Caribbean area, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago, Barbados, have also normalized their relations with Cuba.

The establishment of relations between Cuba and Venezuela is especially significant because of petroleum. Since 1960, every ounce of petroleum that Cuba's refineries has received has come from Soviet Black Sea ports thousands of miles away. The OAS petroleum embargo against Cuba was meant to strangle the nation's economy but has failed to do so. Now Cuba will have a source of petroleum just hours away from her shores. Mexico has also shown great interest in supplying Cuba with petroleum.

Finally, there is the question of U.S.-Cuban detente. When President Gerald Ford took office there was expectation that steps would soon be taken to normalize U.S.-Cuban relations. At his first news conference Mr. Ford said that the United States "would act in concert with other members of the OAS" in regard to its Cuban policy.

At Quito, the U.S. representative abstained from voting on the embargo resolution as did delegates from six other countries. This amounted to the kiss of death for the end-the-embargo resolution, and it ended speculation that entente between the United States and Cuba was imminent.

Digging through my notes, I found a statement by Fidel Castro made in July 1969 to a small group of correspondents who had accompanied him on a visit to a sugar cane plantation. He told us then that "all our plans are based on not having relations with the United States for 10 years, for 20 years, indefinitely." A lot has changed since Castro said that and most observers here in Havana believe that U.S.-Cuban relations are, at most, only a few years away.