

BRITISH ATTITUDES IN THE CUBAN CRISIS

H. A. DeWeerd

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The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California

The Cuban crisis saw the beginning of a decline in the cordiality of Anglo-American relations. It showed how little influence Britain had on a crisis which -- if it had escalated up to general war -- might have involved them in thermonuclear war. The crisis found the British playing almost no role in an incident in which the major decisions were being made by other powers. The Cuban crisis was said to have produced greater tension in Britain than any other incident since the end of World War II. As one Member of Parliament put it:

...we have lived through a terrible crisis. In my short life, so far, I cannot remember any such tense atmosphere as we had then. We had a terrible shock. There was a general feeling of helplessness -- indeed of hopelessness....¹

The Prime Minister alluded to these feelings by saying that after he had sent his message to Khrushchev on Sunday,

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¹John Morris in House of Commons Debates, October 31, 1962, col. 226.

October 28, there was nothing Britain could do but wait and see what would happen.

Partly as a consequence of the tensions and the feeling of helplessness, Britishers expressed their attitudes during and after the crisis with unusual frankness. The purpose of this essay is to examine some of these attitudes.

The way in which the Cuban crisis developed and was announced to them surprised and displeased the British people. Having made his decision on October 22 to impose a naval quarantine on Cuba, the President sent a personal representative to Paris and Bonn to explain the American position and action but did not send one to London. It was reported by Mark Arnold Foster that when the American Ambassador, David K. Bruce, brought the Prime Minister the first full account of American plans and pictures of the Soviet missile installations before lunch on October 22, he found the Prime Minister "angry, depressed and uneasy." "No one," wrote this correspondent, "tried at all hard to conceal the Government's resentment."²

Although the government may have wanted to support American actions in Cuba, it could not be very enthusiastic about naval quarantines or blockades. As Anthony Courtney wrote: "We in these islands are infinitely the most vulnerable member of the Western block to this form of pressure, and present British naval weakness is such that we could not conceivably withstand such a use of Soviet sea power without the aid of allies whose interests do not always coincide with our own...."³

²The Observer, November 28, 1962.

³The Times (London), October 29, 1962.

As soon as photographic evidence made it clear that Soviet offensive missiles were in fact being sent into Cuba, the British government lined up in support of the American position and attitude. The government was quicker to accept American claims than some British correspondents who, as the Prime Minister said, showed an "exaggerated neutrality," who tried to "throw doubt on American claims and good faith," and who were inclined to be "more skeptical of statements of their allies than of the Communists." People reading these writers were bound to be influenced in the crisis.

On October 26 the British government had information which allowed it to believe that Soviet ships would not attempt to push their way through the naval quarantine. This provided Macmillan with an opportunity to persuade the Soviet Union that it had something important to gain by pulling its missiles out of Cuba. On October 28, after the crisis had to an extent been alleviated by Soviet actions, Mr. Macmillan sent the following telegram to Khrushchev:

The essence of the position reached is that once the problem posed by the offensive missile bases in Cuba has been dealt with under effective United Nations control and the situation in the area normalized, the way would be open for us all to work towards a more general arrangement regarding armaments. For instance, we should be able to reach an early conclusion about the banning of tests of nuclear weapons on which much progress has already been made, as well as to give firm directives to settle the main elements in the first stage of disarmament. I would hope that this might mark a new

determination to resolve the problems from which the world is suffering. I therefore ask you to take the action necessary to make all this possible. This is an opportunity which we should seize.⁴

By what he later called a "strange coincidence," Macmillan's message arrived in Moscow at about the time that the British radio was giving people the welcome news that Khrushchev had agreed to pack up his missiles and take them out of Cuba.

Khrushchev could hardly have welcomed the ideas contained in the Macmillan message. It told him that after Khrushchev had pulled his missiles out of Cuba, new opportunities would exist for him to make concessions on test ban and disarmament matters. For what had been holding up progress in these fields was Soviet intransigence, not British or American reluctance to proceed. All the opportunities for progress on disarmament matters referred to in Macmillan's message were available anyway. The crisis may have retarded rather than increased the prospects for progress in this field.⁵ This seemed to be demonstrated when the reconvened Geneva conference met on arms control measures after the crisis.

Since the single British effort at intervention in the Cuban crisis produced little or nothing, it might have been more dignified for the British government, like the French, to have gone through the crisis in stony silence

⁴Quoted in The Times (London), November 31, 1962.

⁵After a Conservative Party meeting it was reported that there was a "bleak sense that all the patient work toward a disarmament formula at Geneva during the past few years had been aborted or vitiated by Russian deviousness." The Times (London), October 29, 1962.

rather than make a minor attempt at intervention. Macmillan, however, must have felt that his country, his party, and the office of Prime Minister required him to "do something" in the crisis. The only other Englishman who intervened in the crisis with messages to the principals was the aged unilateralist leader, Lord Russell, who favored Kennedy and Khrushchev with "do don't" messages.

John Strachey, a Labour M.P., wrote about Macmillan's intervention as follows:

I cannot feel that any of us in Britain, Government or Opposition, cut a very distinguished figure in the crisis. Mr. Macmillan's public pronouncements and what one hears about his private reactions, sounded to me rather like those of a fussy old retired nanny, forever calling out: "Oh, oh, Master Jack, do be careful or the bad men will get you!" The role of Britain in this confrontation of the two nuclear powers could only be a modest one. When there was little that we could say which made any difference, might it not have been more dignified to assert our solidarity with our ally, and, for the rest, keep silence?⁶

With respect to consultation, the Prime Minister said that the crisis had boiled up so rapidly that there was little time for extensive consultation. He said that all the allies were "given the same information" and added that the American government had preserved diplomatic propriety and maintained the closest possible cooperation

⁶In The Observer, November 11, 1962. Strachey's Labour Party colleagues were among the most irrepressible commentators during the crisis. They apparently did not share his view.

with its allies.⁷ After the crisis was over British newspapers quoted "White House sources" to assure readers that "during the week of the Cuban crisis, consultation between the President and the Prime Minister had been more frequent and intimate than was publicly known."⁸ A correspondent of The Times later felt able to say that during the crisis Macmillan spoke with the President twice a day over the phone.⁹

What made consultation of a deliberate sort impossible was the President's personal style of administration in a crisis. He kept all messages and decisions closely held within the executive committee of the National Security Council. Even with this kind of close control of information from the White House, George Wigg, a Labour M.P., said that the United States was far less guilty of deception in the Cuban crisis than Britain was in the Suez affair.

One British newspaper reprinted at length Walter Lippmann's views on consultation. In a lecture delivered in Paris on the 75th anniversary of the founding of the European edition of The New York Herald Tribune, he said:

As I understand what went on, our allies were not consulted in the Cuban crisis because of the belief that the risk of war would have been much increased. The American intention was to react sharply, but for a limited aim and with limited means. Had this intention become known before it was announced -- and in a consultation it would almost surely have become known -- there was a probability

⁷House of Commons Debates, 30 October 1962, col. 36.

⁸The Times (London), December 8, 1962.

⁹Ibid., December 10, 1962.

that the Soviet Government would have taken the initiative either by proclaiming defiantly the presence of missiles or by denouncing the proposed quarantine as an act of "piracy."

Had the denunciation been made before the quarantine was proclaimed and enforced, both Moscow and Washington would have been committed to a collision course....¹⁰

If Lippmann's views are correct, our NATO allies could have had consultation, but this might have stood in the way of a successful termination of the crisis. They could have "information" and still allow the United States an adequate chance of resolving the crisis in an acceptable manner. But they could not have both consultation and an assured favorable outcome of the crisis. John Foster Dulles gave some good advice back in 1956: "...the process of consultation," he said, "should never enmesh us in a procedural web so that we fall victim to the ability of despotisms to act suddenly and with all their might."

Although the official British attitude was that the United States had given them all the information necessary during the Cuban crisis, the unofficial attitude did not follow this line. Speaking at the Assembly of the Western European Union on December 4, 1962, Mr. Anthony Kershaw, M.P. introduced a resolution calling for closer integration of military and political plans within the Atlantic alliance and for consultation between allies on all problems likely

¹⁰Reprinted from The Observer, December 2, 1962. There is an element of contradiction between this statement and an opinion of Lippmann that Kennedy should have taken Gromyko to task about the missiles in Cuba at their pre-crisis conference on October 18.

to lead to a grave crisis, even though it were "outside the Nato area."¹¹

There was a tendency among writers in England to equate America and Russia during the Cuban crisis as if their actions and responsibilities were the same, as well as to equate American bases in Turkey with Soviet bases in Cuba. This, as one writer suggested, might be understandable on the part of the élite of the recently-formed independent countries of Africa and Asia, or on the part of confused simple people at home, but "what was one to think of professional commentators," he asked, "who at this critical time revealed in their articles that they apparently never heard that politics was mainly concerned with power...?"¹² Equating Turkish and Cuban bases as equal was one manifestation of this phenomenon. Few examined the implications of such a base swap. As Sir C. Mott-Radclyffe said in the House of Commons:

...consider what the result would have been if the Russians had succeeded in doing what I might call an Aladdin's Lamp deal, swapping new bases for old. If it had been successful in Cuba, it would have been repeated elsewhere.... Before we knew where we were, piece by piece the whole defensive system of the free world would be dismantled in return for the Russians agreeing to relax tensions they had no right to create anyway....¹³

¹¹The Times (London), December 5, 1962.

¹²Encounter, January 1963, p. 86.

¹³House of Commons Debates, 31 October 1962, col. 234.

One feature of Soviet behavior which aroused British indignation was the deception practiced by Khrushchev, Gromyko, Zorin and others in assuring the world that no Soviet offensive missiles were being sent to Cuba while in fact they were rushing the installation of such weapons on the island. Like Americans the British seem to feel that this kind of [man-to-man] deception is unforgivable. Peter Thomas, Joint Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, held forth as follows:

One lesson of the Cuban crisis stands out clearly for all to see. It is that nothing could be more dangerous than an attempt toward disarmament without adequate and foolproof provisions for verification and control. The actions of the Soviet Government in Cuba have exposed to everyone the folly of accepting verbal assurances, even when they are solemnly given by Russia's most exalted representatives.¹⁴

The Soviet disregard for truth presented some problems for left wing "protesters" in Britain. As Philip Toynbee wrote:

From midnight on Monday of President Kennedy's speech...I believed that the blockade was a monstrous and cold-blooded election stunt; that there were no Russian missiles on Cuba, and that the physical invasion of Cuba was the next step in this wicked United States plot. By Wednesday I had judged, from Russian reactions to the crisis, that President Kennedy had told the literal truth about the Russian rocket sites; and I was forced to make an immediate

¹⁴House of Commons Debates, 31 October 1962, col. 292.

volte-face.... Being a unilateralist
disarmer of the most extreme type, I
was outraged by the extension of nuclear
arms and nuclear tension into a new area.¹⁵

Few of Toynbee's unilateralist friends joined him in admitting that Mr. Khrushchev had "lied, provoked and threatened the world with destruction."

The universities of England were aroused by the crisis. Sixty professors signed a letter to Mr. Macmillan demanding that Britain refuse to be drawn into a world conflict over Cuba; a signature list which was later increased to 600. This led to counter letters and petitions "deploring the impression that University opinion...is willing at the first sign of crisis to attribute the worst motives to the United States" and reminding readers that 600 signatures represented a small sampling of the 12,000 university teachers in Britain. One professor, dismayed by what was happening, wrote sadly:

If this cohort of professional petition mongers and protest makers...who seem always ready to take any side except our own, to espouse any policy destined to weaken and ultimately destroy our free institutions -- if they are successful in passing their muddled beliefs on to their students, I fear that the Britain of tomorrow will cease to exist for want of anyone convinced that it ought to survive."¹⁶

Throughout the Cuban crisis the attitude of the Labour Party was skeptical of American intentions, fearful of its

¹⁵Quoted in Encounter, January 1963, p. 95.

¹⁶The Times (London), November 30, 1962.

actions, and critical of what the British Government had done in the crisis. It presented a picture of fear, divisions and futile excitement. On October 24, the Labour Party Executive Committee met and released a press statement which:

(1) questioned the legality of the American naval quarantine;

(2) refused to accept as "proved" the assertion that long-range missiles had been established in Cuba;

(3) suggested that if such missiles were really there, it represented a new "potential" threat to the United States and other countries in the western hemisphere;

(4) regretted that American action had been taken without consultation with her allies and in advance of the meeting of the United Nations;

(5) asked both sides to exercise restraints.

No one voted against the statement but two members of the Executive refrained from voting on the ground that the statement was too weak and did not go far enough in condemning the naval quarantine or in "insisting" on consultation.¹⁷

Several hours later, a delegation from the Trades Union Council (TUC) had a conference with Lord Home, the Foreign Secretary, and issued a statement of its own. It accepted the American statement that there were Soviet missiles in Cuba, and said it was "profoundly disturbed." It recognized that the Cuban crisis had by this time been taken to the United Nations"; but they deplored the lack

¹⁷The Times (London), October 25, 1962.

of consultation of allies by the United States.¹⁸

Earlier in the crisis, on October 23, Hugh Gaitskell, Leader of the Opposition, seemed to draw a parallel between the Kennedy speech of October 22 and President Truman's press conference remark in 1950 that the use of nuclear weapons in Korea was under consideration. That remark prompted the sudden flight of Mr. Attlee to Washington for a conference in 1950 which left him assured that no use would be made of nuclear weapons without adequate consultation. In a similar manner, Mr. Gaitskell proposed that Macmillan visit Washington "as soon as possible" to discuss the Cuban crisis with President Kennedy.¹⁹ It was reported that Labour Party leaders regarded the Cuban crisis as far more dangerous than the Korean crisis and wanted "much closer consultation with the Americans in view of possible developments in Europe."

Among the others who protested against the lack of consultation was Mr. Gaitskell's successor, Harold Wilson, Yet what was there to consult about? Sir William Hayter, former British Ambassador to Moscow who felt that there never was any danger of the Soviet Union starting an atomic war over Cuba, dismissed the Labour Party fuss about consultation as "absurd." "If Labour had been in power," he asked, "what would its leaders have said?" Elbow jogging would not help and advice was not needed in Washington.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., October 24, 1962.

²⁰ The Observer, November 11, 1962.

The Cuban Embassy in London kept the belief alive in some Labour Party circles that there were no Soviet missiles in Cuba as late as October 26. For on that day the Embassy issued a statement echoing the Soviet contention and saying:

It is ludicrous indeed to think that Cuba has long range nuclear weapons and that the Soviet Union could be interested in establishing such bases, when it has been acknowledged that the U.S.S.R. has a sufficient number of such weapons on its own territory to be adequate for its own purposes.²¹

Until the Soviet Union officially admitted that it would remove such missiles from Cuba, some Labour politicians refused to believe that they were there. It gave them a convenient excuse to practice anti-Americanism. When finally the Soviet deception could no longer be concealed, some Labour politicians, like R. H. S. Crossman, who earlier wanted to help "extricate" Kennedy "from the mess he was in," adopted a "plague on both your houses" attitude, saying both Russian actions and American counteractions were "insane" and that Britain "should stop it in the future."²² Harold Wilson somehow thought the outcome of the crisis was "just what Khrushchev had intended it to be...."

Some left wing Labour M.P.'s took the attitude that the American naval quarantine was "illegal" and "an act of war." The pacifist Sydney Silverman declared:

The naval blockade was a plain, naked, brutal act of war. Nobody denies that really....²³

²¹Ibid.

²²House of Commons Debates, 31 October 1962, col. 218.

²³Ibid., col. 207.

But he was interrupted by a Labour colleague, George Wigg, who said:

I most certainly do...the blockade was not a plain brutal act of war. It was an honest endeavour on a very limited scale....

William Warbey, not to be outdone by other left-wing colleagues, complained that instead of writing to Khrushchev as he did, the Prime Minister should have said to President Kennedy:

The moment you sink a Russian ship or drop a bomb, or invade Cuba, we shall immediately immobilize every nuclear base in this country, announce it to the world and ask the United Nations observers to verify it....²⁴

Warbey thus neatly combined the objectives of unilateralism with a response to American action in the Cuban crisis.

To the embarrassment of some of their more responsible colleagues, forty Labour M.P.'s wrote a letter to the Editor of The Times on November 19, 1962, giving the left wing Labour Party view point on the "lessons of the Cuban crisis." It said:

If Russian missiles in Cuba were a threat to American cities (as we believe they were) then United States missiles ringing the U.S.S.R. are equally a threat to Soviet cities. This is the lesson which millions have learned from the terrifying events of the Cuban crisis.

Now that Mr. Khrushchev has withdrawn his missiles, Mr. Kennedy should respond similarly. Unless the West makes some

²⁴Ibid., November 2, 1962, col. 554.

counter-concessions Mr. Khrushchev's present policies may be replaced with tougher ones.

We in Britain should press the United Kingdom Government to ask Mr. Kennedy to remove his Polaris and Thor missile bases from this country immediately. These bases heighten world tension. They also make it certain that the British people would be incinerated in the first hours of a world war.²⁵

This letter triggered off a characteristic intra-party dispute in which Lord Morrison replied from the House of Lords as follows:

...what is virtually asked for is the abandonment of collective security for the free world; yet Labour strongly argued for collective security as against the policy of the late Mr. Neville Chamberlain in relation to the aggressive policies of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy....

Why should the 40 M.P.'s want to weaken the free world at a time when Communist China is conducting brutal aggression against India, who has not herself entered into any collective security agreements?²⁶

People in England reacted to the Cuban crisis in a variety of fashions. School children demonstrated their objections to the crisis by a series of "strikes." The Sixth form at Midhurst Grammar School in Sussex refused to continue their studies. Sixty girls at Glamor Grammar

²⁵The Times (London), November 20, 1962.

²⁶Ibid., November 21, 1962.

School in Swansea walked out in protest against the American naval quarantine of Cuba. Three older students at the Teachers' College in the same town went on a hunger strike, as did a Leicester University student.²⁷ There were protest marches at several universities, and an organization called "Mothers Against War" cabled the Pope to put an immediate stop to Kennedy's activities.

British nervousness in the crisis was contrasted unfavorably by one Englishman in America with his impression of American calmness and confidence. His reading of British newspapers confirmed the impression of "a nervous and divided British opinion."²⁸ After the crisis was resolved, one correspondent asked: "Is it possible that some of those who denounced President Kennedy's threat of military action against Cuba now feel as silly as they look?"²⁹

David E. Painter, an English socialist, temporarily residing in the United States, found the reactions of certain sections of British opinion scarcely credible. He understood the natural sympathy of the British Left for the underdog Castro, but wrote:

Once Dr. Castro accepted Russian strategic missiles he forfeited all claim to be regarded as the innocent leader of a nation struggling to be free.

In nearly every major crisis since 1945 the United States Government has shown deplorably little military and diplomatic finesse, but when the Cuban crisis came to a head last month President Kennedy

²⁷Encounter, January 1963, pp. 87, 89, 91.

²⁸H. V. Hodson, Provost of Ditchley in The Times (London), November 26, 1962.

²⁹Ibid., November 3, 1962.

acted with a combined firmness and moderation that augurs well for the peace of the world....

The United States has suffered, and frequently deserved severe censure from British critics, but I would remind my fellow Socialists that in the Cuban dispute the Americans are not the only, nor even the principal, villains of the piece. The American President is not ipso facto invariably wrong, and on the rare occasions when he happens to be right we ought not to stint our praise and support.³⁰

When it became clear that there would be no thermo-nuclear war over Cuba and that the Soviet Union would withdraw its missiles from Cuba, there was widespread relief in Labour Party circles in England. This was sometimes accompanied by the belief that Khrushchev was to be credited with preserving the peace. Those who felt this way quickly forgot that it was Khrushchev's initiative in the first place which raised the danger of war.

Few spokesmen of the Left were frank enough to admit, as did one writer in The Observer that "most non-Americans have taken the position for two years now that Americans were making the Castro molehill into a mountain and fools of themselves. We should now admit that on at least four important points events have proved us wrong."³¹ Denis Healey, writing after the event, said that President Kennedy had "avoided all the mistakes which made last year's abortive invasion so damaging to the United States'

³⁰Ibid., November 7, 1962.

³¹The Observer, October 28, 1962.

reputation." He thought the President's actions were "precisely calculated to achieve a specific objective..." and that he "made it clear that his aim was a limited one." "The whole operation," he wrote, "could serve as a model in the text books of diplomatic gamesmanship on which The RAND Corporation spends so much ingenuity."³²

The unilateralists, Committee of 100, and the anti-American protesters had a field day in the Cuban crisis. They found in the crisis a vindication of their chronic fears of nuclear war to be unleashed by rash American action. Their criticism of United States action was immediate and severe. Protest marches were organized against the American Embassy and mass meetings were held in Trafalgar Square without official permission.

Persistent anti-Americanism trapped the unilateralists in a logical absurdity. Their major platform stood for doing away with nuclear weapons, but in the Cuban crisis, they supported the Soviet Union which was introducing nuclear weapons into an area in which they had been absent. They opposed American actions which were aimed at restoring the Caribbean to the status of a nuclear free zone. But since unilateralism resembles a religion, no one seemed embarrassed by logical absurdities.

While the Cuban crisis was under way, the Chinese Communists were engaged in an aggression against northern India, but the unilateralists did not mass in front of the Chinese Legation in London protesting against this military activity. It was much more fun protesting against the Americans.

³²"The Diplomatic Turning Point," in The New Leader, November 12, 1962, p. 6.

At one stage or another the unilateralists repeated all the Labour Party claims. The American quarantine was an "illegal blockade." The blockade was an act of war. America had not consulted its ally Britain whose people might be "incinerated" in a thermonuclear war arising from American actions. Americans were criticized for being "blinded by hatred for Castro." Khrushchev, whose nuclear initiative started the crisis, was cheered as the protector of the peace; while Kennedy who showed what some Americans believe was a "distressing" willingness to negotiate in the crisis, was condemned as a warmonger. For a time the unilateralists refused to believe that Russian missiles were in Cuba. The American pictures were denounced as "fakes"; the American claims were regarded as "lies." Lord Russell refused to accept the American photographs because they were taken "by an interested party."

As for the Prime Minister's support of the United States, William Warbey, M.P. described it as:

...[an act of] treachery to the British people unexampled in the history of British Prime Ministers. The Prime Minister should be impeached for daring, when he had the opportunity to protect the British people, to hand them over on a plate to be used as pawns, to be sacrificed, if necessary, in a game of high power politics which might so easily have ended in total disaster.³³

Members of Parliament were bombarded by unilateralist protests and requests. One member, Cyril Bence of Dumbartonshire, said he was "sickened by the experience" of corresponding with and talking to people who assured

³³House of Commons Debates, November 2, 1962, col. 555.

him time and time again that there were no Soviet missiles in Cuba and that all the photographs in the British newspapers were "fakes."³⁴ Another said he had received a letter from an ardent unilateralist saying that the lesson of the Cuban and Indian crises was that "Britain should adopt a policy of 'positive neutrality.'" This led the recipient to ask: "But what other policy has Mr. Nehru been adopting all these years, rightly or wrongly?"³⁵

Members of the unilateralist movement reacted to the crisis in different ways. Some stayed in London to protest in front of the American Embassy and in Trafalgar Square. Others, like Misses Pat Arrowsmith and Wendy Butlin, leaders in the Committee of 100, headed for the security of the west coast of Ireland. They informed the newspapers that they had not "gone on vacation" but since there seemed to be nothing that an ordinary person could do to avert war, they decided to go as swiftly as possible to a place where they might survive a nuclear war.

But the person who got the last ounce of advantage and excitement out of the crisis was the aged leader of the Committee of 100, Lord Russell. He took it upon himself to set up a kind of private foreign office in a rented villa in Plas Penrhyn, Wales. From here he sent out a stream of messages to Khrushchev, U-Thant, President Kennedy, Prime Minister Macmillan, Pablo Casals, Albert Schweitzer, and Cyrus Eaton.³⁶ This gave him the outward appearance of

³⁴Ibid., October 31, 1962, col. 261.

³⁵Ibid., col. 189.

³⁶The Observer, November 4, 1962.

being deeply involved in the mechanics and outcome of the crisis. Schweitzer, Casals, and Eaton were asked if they would be willing to act as "mediators" in the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. An emergency meeting of the Pugwash scientists was proposed, as if this had any relevance in the crisis.³⁷

The tone and character of Lord Russell's telegrams to Kennedy and Khrushchev differed sharply. To the latter he wrote:

MAY I HUMBLY APPEAL FOR YOUR FURTHER
HELP IN LOWERING THE TEMPERATURE DE-
SPITE THE WORSENING SITUATION. YOUR
CONTINUED FORBEARANCE IS OUR GREAT
HOPE. WITH MY HIGH REGARDS AND SIN-
CERE THANKS.

It was this telegram to which Khrushchev gave a long and rambling reply saying that the Soviet Government would not allow itself to be provoked and would do all that it could to prevent war.

The fact that he got a much-publicized reply to his cable from Khrushchev caused Lord Russell's impatience with President Kennedy to increase. For Russell's cable asking Kennedy to retract his Cuban policy got lost amid thousands of other telegrams and was not answered until much later. It was a typical piece of unilateralist special pleading and read:

YOUR ACTION DESPERATE THREAT TO HUMAN
SURVIVAL. NO CONCEIVABLE JUSTIFICATION.
CIVILIZED MAN CONDEMNS IT. WE WILL NOT
HAVE MASS MURDER. ULTIMATUM MEANS WAR.
I DO NOT SPEAK FOR POWER BUT PLEAD FOR
CIVILIZED MAN. END THIS MADNESS.

³⁷ Ibid.

After the Soviet Union admitted that they had missiles in Cuba and had agreed to withdraw them, President Kennedy sent a soft reply to Russell saying: "I think your attention might now be directed to the burglars rather than to those who have caught the burglars." To this reply Lord Russell's attitude was: "Ridiculous -- he [Kennedy] is the burglar because Cuba was threatened and she sought protection."³⁸

In his spare moments during the crisis Russell wrote a pamphlet entitled YOU ARE TO DIE, which was paid for by the Cuban Embassy in London.³⁹ He tried in addition to get the British newspapers to fully realize the dangers of nuclear war.

Only after the crisis in Cuba had subsided, did Russell turn his attention to the Chinese aggression against India. When he did so it was not to condemn the Chinese attack on India so much as to recommend that the Indians accept the Chinese offer of a cease fire. On November 25, Russell told the newspapers that he had received a message from Chou En-lai, asking him to use his influence with Mr. Nehru to get him to accept the Chinese offer. Russell said:

After the Chinese announcement of a unilateral cease fire and withdrawal, I wrote to Mr. Nehru again expressing this opinion [that a war would escalate and become nuclear involving the destruction of the world] in very emphatic terms and urging him to accept the admirable and

³⁸Interview in the Daily Worker for October 29, 1962, quoted in Encounter, January 1963, p. 89.

³⁹The Observer, November 4, 1962.

generous Chinese unilateral action as a
basis for negotiations leading to peace....⁴⁰

Though one may feel little sympathy for Mr. Nehru, in the light of his own past record, one can imagine the annoyance with which he received this message from one of the few persons who have outdone him in condoning communist actions.

Lord Russell did not escape criticism in England for his role in the Cuban crisis. The writer Cassandra referred to his actions as one of the "ludicrous aspects of the crisis," saying that Russell was "blatantly anti-American and servilely pro-Communist." Whether it had any relation to his part in the Cuban crisis or not is obscure, but Lord Russell temporarily withdrew from the leadership of the Committee of 100 shortly after the crisis.

In estimating British attitudes toward the Cuban crisis, one must distinguish between those of the government which supported the actions of the United States and those of the writers and commentators. A leading British editor advised the London correspondent of the U.S. News and World Report that there was a moral for America in the British attitudes and reactions to the Cuban crisis. This moral was "Don't listen to Britain in a crisis." No doubt what he had in mind were the press stories which increased the fear of nuclear war, attacked the position of the United States, and presented the Soviet Union as the preserver of peace.

⁴⁰The Times (London), November 26, 1962. How this escalation would happen was not clear since neither India nor China had nuclear weapons.