

CONTINUED...

Embargo

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some instances Cuban physicians have found it impossible to obtain life-saving medicines from any source, under any circumstances."

Those sentiments were echoed by Peter Mott, a Presbyterian from Pittsford, who has deliberately violated the U.S. embargo against Cuba. Mott's done so as part of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization-Pastors for Peace, a New York City-based ecumenical group that has been defying the Cuban embargo since the early 1990s.

Mott said he has participated in three efforts to ship humanitarian aid as well as computers and vehicles to Cuba through Pastors for Peace. He traveled with Pastors for Peace to Cuba last June, and while he noted that the Cubans are suffering nowhere near as badly as the Iraqis, they are nonetheless feeling the effects of being cut off from U.S. trade. Like Malthaner, he visited children in hospitals and was moved by their suffering.

"You have children dying of asthmatic attacks because they can't get enough asthma medicine," he claimed.

Dupes of dictators?

If one asks their critics, Malthaner and Mott are simply aiding tyranny — albeit, unwittingly — by their actions.

For example, when told about Bishop Gumbleton's delegation to Iraq, a State Department official — who spoke to the *Courier* on condition of anonymity — noted that he had little use for U.S. citizens willing to break the Iraqi embargo.

(The Iraqi authorities) "milk this for everything they can politically get," the

official said. "They don't give a tinker's damn for the Iraqi people."

The official added that the United Nations cut a deal last year in which Iraq may sell a certain amount of oil every six months in order to buy food on the world market, but that the Iraqis have yet to fully take advantage of the deal.

Meanwhile, Dr. Adolfo Leyva De Varona, an anti-Castro Cuban-American activist, scoffed at the efforts of Pastors for Peace, whom he called "useful idiots" for the Castro government. In a phone interview from Miami, he noted that many Cuban-Americans are already supplying their relatives with humanitarian goods and money through agencies that comply with conditions allowed by U.S. law.

"To me, (Pastors for Peace) are doing the work of the Castro regime," he said.

De Varona is executive coordinator of the Miami-based Endowment for Cuban-American Studies, which operates under the auspices of The Cuban American National Foundation. De Varona claimed 24,000 member families support the foundation.

A fervent supporter of the embargo, De Varona asserted that as many as 85 to 93 percent of recent Cuban exiles in the Miami area support the U.S. embargo.

However, he added that many Cubans he knows would prefer that the embargo be an all-or-nothing affair by the whole international community — and not just the United States. Otherwise, he said, many Cubans would rather see it end.

Two Rochester-area Cubans who don't like the embargo say it only hurts Cuba's common people while failing to undermine support for Castro.

Alberto and Hiram Jimenez are brothers who left Cuba in 1980 in search of greater personal and economic freedom.

However, both noted they are not particularly anti-Castro, and, in fact, Hiram called Castro "a hero," albeit, one who has created a flawed system of government.

The brothers, parishioners at St. Michael's Church on Clinton Avenue, made sharp distinctions between their criticisms of Cuba's government and their love of the Cuban people — a love, they noted, that makes them oppose the embargo.

"I'm not on (President) Clinton's side, I'm not on Castro's side," said Alberto. "I'm a Cuban."

"The main purpose of this is all political," Hiram added of the embargo. "It's not to do with the welfare of the people. It doesn't make any sense. It's been there since day one of the revolution ... and it's not served any purpose in obtaining the results the (United States) wanted 36, 37 years ago."

An alternative to war

In 1993, the U.S. bishops addressed the use of economic sanctions in a pastoral letter titled "The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace." "Harvest" was issued on the 10th anniversary of another bishops' letter — "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Respons."

"Harvest" pointed out that economic sanctions could be a useful tool to effect change in repressive regimes as well as "a means of combating aggression short of military intervention ..." But the bishops offered four criteria for nations to carefully consider before punishing other nations economically:

• Sanctions should be considered only in response to aggression or grave and ongoing injustice after less coercive measures have been tried, and with clear and

reasonable conditions set for their removal.

• Harm caused by sanctions should be proportionate to the good likely to be achieved; sanctions should avoid grave and irreversible harm to the civilian population. The denial of basic needs may not be used as a weapon.

• Substantial portions of the affected population should consent to the sanctions.

• Sanctions should always be part of a broader process of diplomacy aimed at finding an effective political solution to the injustice.

Calling for an end

The Iraqi embargo has yet to be lifted because the Iraqis have not complied with such U.N. demands calling for the accounting of and dismantling of suspected Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. But, according to Voices In The Wilderness, the embargo allegedly has no effect on Saddam Hussein's recalcitrant regime while helping to cause the death and suffering of thousands of Iraqis.

Because it holds this position, Voices has called for the U.S. Catholic bishops to issue a statement against the Iraqi embargo at their next meeting, Nov. 10-13, in Washington, D.C.

As for Cuba, the U.S. bishops have listened to their brother bishops in Cuba, according to Thomas E. Quigley, foreign policy adviser to the U.S. Catholic Conference. While critical of actions taken against the church by Castro's regime, both the U.S. and Cuban bishops in recent years have continually called for a relaxation of the embargo, he noted.

"The people in Cuba ... certainly don't see the embargo as a positive thing," he said.

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