

## KENNEDY'S NEW FRONTIER

WINIFRED F. COURTNEY

*Referent on Africa for the United States Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*

CUBA took the bloom off, for many Americans. To the vast majority of the many, the bloom came off because the Kennedy-propelled invasion of Cuba was a military miscalculation. Had it succeeded, the bloom would have been on, at home—and tragically off in the rest of the world. Said Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, in a speech ignored by the press, eight days after the Cuban fiasco:

“I say to the Senators today that it is my judgment that if the United States seeks to settle its differences with Cuba through the use of military might, either direct or indirect, we shall be at least a half century recovering, if we ever recover, the prestige, the understanding, the sympathy, and the confidence of one Latin American neighbour after another.” Adlai Stevenson, sadder and wiser after his recent trip through South America, reported that our prestige had dropped calamitously.

Senator Morse said too:

“In my judgment, that course of action was in violation of the spirit—and probably the letter as well—of treaties to which the United States is a party. It was also in violation, at least of the spirit, and I am not sure that it was not also a violation of the letter, of existing domestic legislation. . . .

Let us call upon the United Nations . . . for the solution of this problem. That is a much better solution of this problem than training exiles, supplying them, and urging them to invade Cuba, and then trying to wash off our hands the bloody spots.”

Senator Morse is Chairman of the Senate's Latin-American Subcommittee. Neither he nor Senator Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, though Democrats both, had been consulted on the invasion in advance. Among public figures, they were almost alone in expressing their disapproval for *moral* reasons. Dean Rusk and Chester Bowles and Stevenson are said to have opposed the action, but could hardly say so in public—though it would have been brave and salutary if they had.

The majority of the nation's newspapers echoed the '*Washington Post*':

"One lesson of the operation in Cuba is the extent to which Communist arms and training already have been consolidated there so as to imperil defections and afford a base for penetration elsewhere. The fact gives full warrant to Mr. Kennedy's warning that this country will act, with its neighbours if possible but by itself if necessary, to protect its own security in the hemisphere."

To the small minority of Americans for whom Senator Morse spoke, the disillusion was fourfold: (1) Americans had been lied to again and Adlai Stevenson—wittingly or not—did some of the lying (the '*New York Times*' ran a leader: "The Right Not To Be Lied To"); (2) we were caught in an intolerable moral position which we refused to acknowledge as such; (3) Premier Castro's support was strengthened to the point where he was able (read 'driven') to take his country more inexorably than ever into the Communist camp; and (4) our promising new leader had shown a foolhardy lack of judgment which bodes ill for other crises to come.

The abdication of censure, moral or otherwise, including that of the Republicans, swiftly and skilfully achieved by the President after the event, was not surprising. Rarely has the American press, whose representatives were on the scene in Cuba together with the scouts of the Central Intelligence Agency, so woefully lent itself to wishful thinking and gross distortion. The Friends Committee on National Legislation and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (Sidney Lens was its excellent reporter) published, before the invasion, impartial, lengthy, and penetrating testimonies that many of the desperate needs of the Cuban people were being met by Premier Castro—of which proof positive has since been given by Castro's arming of Cuban citizens with impunity; C. Wright Mills produced his book, '*Listen, Yankee*'; but such reports reached a strictly limited readership. Even the '*New York Times*' editorial staff member, Herbert Matthews, who did skillful reporting on Castro—now said by some to have been subversive in its effect!—during the Batista period, wrote his dissent from the general chorus not in the '*New York Times*' but in the '*Hispanic American Report*', read by scholars. The vast majority of Americans have been well insulated from the truth. The Fair Play for Cuba Committee and even the group of Harvard professors (including

Lillian Hellman, the playwright) who published their reasoned views became the target of press and other attacks.

I dwell on Cuba not out of malice, but because the way the Cuba débâcle is viewed in retrospect by the Administration is of profound significance for our future. One can only hope that Kennedy has acknowledged the error to himself; no Administration since Roosevelt's has been so sensitive to opinion abroad. If he sees the Cuban revolution as another battle in the world revolution of rising expectations, if he realises that it is certainly seen as such in Africa and Asia and among many of the peoples of South America, he must also evolve a policy at least as constructive as that suggested by Robert Kennedy in respect to Poland. As reported by the *'New York Times'*, the President's brother proposed:

More flexibility in giving aid to Iron Curtain countries.

The strengthening of economic and cultural ties between Poland and the United States.

Increased exchange of students, teachers and technicians.

Exploration with the Polish Government of "the possibility of using our frozen Polish funds on projects of peace that will demonstrate our abiding friendship for and interest in the people of Poland."

If persecution won't work in Europe, how much less will it work in our own hemisphere!—as Latin America realises in refusing to agree to our more extreme proposals for "punishment".

### **American Public Opinion**

During the dying days of the Eisenhower Administration, Kennedy seemed to understand the world revolution remarkably well. He recognised that in the eyes of emerging peoples, the United States has been all too often the defender of colonial and dictatorial oppression rather than the great bastion of freedom it fancies itself to be. This he emphasised in his Senate speech on American policy over Algeria a few years ago, which angered the French. His experience as Chairman of the Senate's Africa Subcommittee had given him sympathetic insight into the problems of the whole continent.

But the gap between opposition criticism and day-to-day practice in office is invariably wide. In office, Kennedy is dependent on public opinion for support, and public opinion in turn depends on the information it is fed in the daily news-

paper—and, of course, though to a lesser degree, by radio and television.

The American press, rapidly being concentrated in ever fewer hands, is all too often dedicated, as we have seen, to the proposition that Capitalism is Holy and the Reds Bad. (The recent imprisonment of some high officials in a great commercial combine for collusion in price-fixing caused it barely a jolt). In its devotion to selling newspapers it doesn't leave room for much more in the way of foreign news than this simple concept, sandwiched in between the woman's page and the local sports. With the exception of the *'New York Times'* and a few other big city newspapers, the United States has been reduced by its daily press to a vast dust-bowl of ignorance. Tom Mboya said not long ago: "I think, more than anything else, America's worst enemy today is the American press."

President Kennedy is, then, the prisoner of this enormous element of uninformed public opinion, expressed through Congress and special-interest pressures, as well as of his own ability—which after all got him elected—to ride two horses at once: the Cold War and World Development under World Law. His nearly equal emphasis on both can be in part attributed to the narrowness of his electoral victory; but it is also quite possible that his own vision is at fault—that he sees the two steeds as a circus team, rather than as the mutually antagonistic forces that they are, bound to dump him catastrophically in the end. A characteristic piece of oratory from the Inaugural Address, which he chose to repeat in his State of the Union message, might seem to confirm this conjecture: "Only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed."

Perhaps never, admittedly, has a President been confronted with such a multitude of problems during his first six months of office: the Congo, Angola, Cuba, Laos, Vietnam, Geneva, Berlin, as well as recession and racial troubles at home. There is not space to describe the extent to which his action on these problems has been motivated by considerations of one or the other—World Law and Cold War—in uncertain vacillation. Arm more heavily, but pursue disarmament. Keep China out of the U.N., but don't antagonise the rest of the world. Declare an interest in a just Laos solution (after prudently withdrawing from a "posture" that threatened military rescue) but fail to see Souvanna Phouma, the neutral hope, because he is going

to arrive one day late in Washington (from Moscow!) . . . The reader can supply his own list. It is an old game for the United States, but we had expected better this time. Kennedy's call to the American people is for "sacrifice". A Mr. Norman Boardman provided this comment in the letter columns of the *'New York Times'*:

"If President Kennedy were asking us to sacrifice for the establishment of world government, if he were asking us to sacrifice to enlighten the world by building attitudes that would make such a government possible, if he were asking us to play our part in creating a peaceful order of society, we might be able to respond with enthusiasm to his call for sacrifice. But when he wants us to go on sacrificing for a bankrupt foreign policy, it is time that his leadership began to face reality".

There have been other weaknesses. One is the conflict among his various advisers, chosen cautiously on a broad base. Yet another is the tendency to leave the U.N. out of crucial negotiations: the small nations will look with anxiety on any further weakening of the world body than the Congo situation has already produced.

It is to be hoped that real leadership will finally develop, for there are few in the country more capable than many of those in government today.

### **Civil Rights**

At home, Kennedy's greatest challenge of international consequence lies in the field of civil rights—the abolition of racial discrimination. Here he began successfully in forcing—by legitimate means—an enlargement of the House of Representatives Rules Committee to curb the power of conservatives in withholding bills from the floor. Efforts to limit debate by filibuster were unsuccessful.

This has been followed—somewhat cautiously, for Kennedy needs Southern support in other areas of his program, such as foreign aid and the campaign against unemployment—by Attorney General Robert Kennedy's declaration of Justice Department intention (now being implemented) to bring suit in Southern courts in cases where Negro voting rights are being manifestly manipulated. In the Freedom Rider disturbances Federal authority has been used to maintain order where the State police have failed, and the U.S. has supported the principle

that inter-State commerce, being Federally controlled, requires the South to allow non-segregated facilities to inter-State travellers. The President has not yet spoken out clearly and forcefully against those (Governors and others) who have encouraged tension and even riot. On occasions when the Administration has indicated that the Freedom Riders might "go slow" now because the issue is pending in the courts, it has been severely criticised by Negro leaders like Martin Luther King, who feel that American Negroes have been supine in the South for far too long.

The riot situations—concomitants of change here as elsewhere—are what make news, as well as the mistreatment of African diplomats on the basis of their skin colour, particularly in regard to housing in Washington and New York. On 7 July the *'New York Times'* reported a drive among Washington real estate agents, under the auspices of the new Negro Federal Housing Administrator, Dr. Robert C. Weaver, and Chester Bowles, Under Secretary of State, to provide such housing. The real estate men, apparently, became eager to provide such housing when they understood the international implications, but then wavered. If African diplomats moved in, what was to prevent the American Negro from following? Discrimination can never be abolished piecemeal.

Until we can eliminate our own gross racial injustices—and Mr. Kennedy has not yet pushed as hard at it as he needs to—our rôle in the non-white world will continue to be suspect.

### **Peace and Foreign Aid**

To turn to more favourable developments, there is certainly a structural emphasis on peace and world development in the new ventures of the Kennedy Administration. The Peace Corps—the young people and older experts who are to go to other parts of the world where they are needed in order to help teach and build for meagre pay—has caught the imagination of our college youth as perhaps no government program ever has before. The road is fraught with dangers, of which everyone involved seems to be well aware; if only to obviate justifiable foreign fears about its possible infiltration by the C.I.A. for spying purposes (which were bitterly voiced at the Cairo All-African Peoples' Conference recently), it would be well to transfer it from direct government control.

Then there is the prospect of a Peace Agency to study

problems of disarmament, not to mention Food For Peace and a multiplicity of programs for assisting underdeveloped countries in one way or another. The President is, as I write, using the Cold War theme for all it is worth to achieve a \$6,000,000,000 foreign aid appropriation from Congress, as well as to overcome the Congressional prejudice against financing foreign aid on the long-term basis which is often imperative if loans are to mean anything to the recipients. Congress likes to review such appropriations annually. Senator Morse, in his usual wisdom, finds that too many of the proposed funds are earmarked for military use; the military allocation will have to be reduced to get *his* vote.

### Kennedy and Africa

Kennedy's policy on Africa has been heartening, particularly to those of us who have long been ashamed of the equivocal rôle our country had chosen to play at the United Nations.

His appointment of Stevenson as U.N. Ambassador was a popular one internationally (at least until Cuba). James Reston, writing in the *'New York Times'* in March, declared:

“ . . . (Stevenson) has not waited for the new African Ambassadors to come to him but has gone all over New York seeking them out in their own homes. The other night he was in the Greenwich Village apartment of the delegate from Upper Volta, sitting on the floor listening to music with a group of Africans and artists from Harlem. And in his own apartment he has been mixing up the races, and the Communists and non-Communists, in an effort to establish easy discussion of world problems on an informal basis.”

Just after his Inauguration, Kennedy refused a Portuguese request to assist in the capture of the *'Santa Maria'*. He has sent numerous envoys to Africa. Assistant Secretary of State Mennen Williams' remark that Africa should belong to (all) Africans pleased African nationalists as much as it infuriated most “Europeans”. The U.S. Ambassador in Tunis officially met two members of the Algerian Provisional Government. On Africa Freedom Day, proclaimed by both houses of Congress, Kennedy took the unprecedented step of asking the African diplomatic corps to the White House in celebration.

At the United Nations, the United States cast off several of its threadbare policies. It began to criticise the Belgians instead of rationalising for them over the Congo, and it sought

a "consensus" for the resolution which, though not yet wholly implemented, has, with hard work by the U.N. on the spot, had a quieting effect. It supported the strong resolution to send the South West Africa Committee into the territory with or without the consent of the South African government. It parted from its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies in order to support the African view on Ruanda-Urundi as well as on Angola. The latter vote was maintained through the June Security Council session, though the U.S. wasn't "happy" about the imputing to Portugal of "repressive measures", at least before a U.N. investigating committee had reported on its findings. In the face of widespread default, the U.S. saw to it that the Congo operation was provided with funds until finances were again discussed in the autumn.

Even on Africa all was not smooth going, however. The United States voted against the resolution, sponsored by twenty-five African States, calling for nations to "consider" strong sanctions against South Africa—on the grounds that it could not vote for measures it could not put into effect. It is true that Congress, under pressure from the business groups that have several hundred million dollars invested in South Africa, would not approve sanctions at this juncture. However, it is clearly high time that the United States set out to destroy apartheid (no one doubts that we could do this if we would). As it is, at least one of our representatives is whispering sweet nothings in Nationalist Party ears, we are collaborating heavily with South Africa on the military plane, and are consistently exercising discrimination at our diplomatic functions. African bitterness over our negative vote on the unsuccessful sanctions resolution very nearly cancelled out the gains of Kennedy's new Africa policies. Cuba finished the job.

Southern Africa, where the West's great tests will come, is indeed already offering its challenge. The United States must support collective measures with "teeth in them" which will seem extreme to a still European-influenced public opinion—there was a great outcry in some quarters here over the Angola vote—but which are considered urgently necessary by Africans, whose own people are being brutally suppressed. If we do not, Africans may make an irrevocable decision over which great nation is friend and which is not, with reverberations throughout the uncommitted world. As with African housing in Washington, half measures are as good as none at all.



The United States has its wretched U.N. record of last autumn—and many autumns—to live down, and African anti-colonial resentment has increased in geometric proportion, over the death of Lumumba and other matters, to the rate at which the power of the new African States to do something about their oppressed fellow Africans has grown. This is particularly true of the 'Casablanca' African powers. Even after the first Stevenson vote on Angola, the delegates to the All-African Peoples' Conference at Cairo in March, dominated by this group, denounced the United States over and over again, as never before.

A South West African exile said to me not long ago: "We have American industries in South West Africa. When we are free and must ask them to give up some of their privileges—perhaps we will even have to have some form of socialism—will the United States do to us what it did to Cuba?"

Cuba again: it will be hard to exorcise that ghost. Kennedy's great task is to plump unreservedly for World Law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—and this is going to require a number of changes. It is a task not easy in America today, one demanding remarkable leadership—greatness perhaps. Has Kennedy got it in him? We still do not know.

