

TO THE WHITE HOUSE, DEAR BILL



I KNOW that these are difficult times for you. The US economy is still in a mess and you seem to be dogged by errors of judgment. But I just wanted a quiet word about your foreign policy. The argument that you have used to justify a much more active involvement of American forces around the world is that 'someone has to make a stand for human rights, someone has to get food through to the starving, someone has to walk past the warlords who would prevent medical aid from reaching the sick and dying'. I don't have any problems with this, but I would ask you to test it against something closer to home than the shambles you are creating in Somalia.

For almost 34 years your country has lived in mortal fear of a small island off your southern coast. It is the island of Cuba. I know that, in American folklore, Cuba has been responsible for untold ills and evils. She has been the cause of mass unemployment in your cities, the collapse of major industries, and the drying up of rivers. Cuba was responsible for Chappacuidik and Vietnam. Cuba was behind the killing of JR in Dallas and the recent death of Cheers. No wonder you feel sore.

But for over three decades you have laid siege to this tiny island; the biggest, strongest country on earth trying to starve 11 million people to death. Before we look at the latest tightening of your blockade around Cuba, let us just consider where it came from.

THE Cuban revolution began from a people who wanted something more out of life than simply being America's largest offshore brothel. It's true they wanted things that they'd never had — the right to a job, to education, to decent health care, to be something more than servants in their own land. For this, they have been punished by the economic blockade you have thrown up around the island and by recurrent threats of US invasion.

For years the country was able to survive and make incredible improvements in education and health care, mainly because it was able to trade the sugar it could produce for oil and goods from Eastern Europe. But the Soviet collapse has left Cuba as vulnerable to you as the people of Mogadishu are to the Somali warlords. This week, the city council in Nottingham hosted a reception for the Cuban Ambassador and the campaign to end the US blockade. It was a brave and simple gesture which recognised the right of people to survive and determine their own future no matter how much they live under the shadow of a super power. With any luck the efforts of groups of people in Nottingham to provide food, medical and practical support for people in Cuba will be reinforced by the twinning of Nottingham with the town of Santa Clara.

WHAT worries me most is that your own government has chosen to renew its hostility and punishment of the Cubans. You propose to ban ships from landing in the USA if they have been to Cuba in the last six months. You are banning American companies from direct and indirect trade with Cuba and threaten punitive tax rules for companies with subsidies that trade with Cuba. For a country which flies the banner of freedom and individual choice,

you ban your own citizens from going to the country, and you demand \$6 billion in reparations from Cuba for 'property losses' since its independence. Perhaps the Cubans will allow you to deduct this from the \$43 billion that your sanctions have so far cost the country.

Now, even the United Nations General Assembly has declared your actions illegal. It is the conduct of a tyrant and a bully towards a people who, despite enormous hardships have, not closed a single classroom nor a single hospital ward in response to your barrage of 'ideological cleansing' in the Caribbean

If you wish to set out the ground for a new approach to the peaceful resolution of global problems — where tolerance and understanding replace tyranny and bullying — then your credibility will be judged in your own garden before you get anyone else's.

You must have the courage to dismantle your own blockade, if you want others to do so with theirs.

That way when the goods and the goodwill begin to flow across from Nottingham, we can all say 'Cheers' to the ending of another part of the Cold War mentality that impoverished us all.