

Fidel Castro's historic legacy

by

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Fidel Castro came to power after defeating the corrupt and despotic regimen of Fulgencio Batista in 1959. Upon arriving triumphantly in Havana he reassured the population in a historic speech that this was a nationalist revolution, that he personally did not want any position of power and would hold elections in six months. His first cabinet was made of prestigious personalities who soon began to resign when they discovered the real "nature of the beast". His government began with a large number of executions without due trial, among them many young men who died before the firing squad shouting "Long live Christ the King" (¡Viva Cristo Rey!). Soon it was decided to "nationalize" (read seize) the assets of foreign companies, mainly American, without offering any compensation. Later on all Cuban enterprises and businesses, large, medium and small were "nationalized". Instead of a nationalist revolution as promised, this turned out to be a State seizing all the wealth and resources of the nation to the detriment of the vast Cuban enterprise class, who had spent a lifetime working hard to create their own businesses and a better future for their families. The majority of these businesses went under when the revolution placed them in the hands of incompetent comrades ("compañeros"). Thus a very productive system was destroyed and the nation was impoverished. The exodus of Cubans began. The revolution far from taking from the rich to give to the poor equalized the entire population to a level of poverty, with the exception of the ruling class, who lives with all the luxuries and privileges. This is the most important legacy Castro left after his death: one of betrayal of his own people and a dramatic destruction of the nation's productive system.

The Bay of Pigs invasion occurred subsequently. The invaders were idealistic young Cubans of middle and upper-middle class supported by the US government, and not mercenaries as the regimen has taught the children in Cuba. In addition to those who died in combat, others died when moved to Havana in a closed vehicle without ventilation dying of asphyxiation. After the overthrow of the invading brigade, Castro decided it was time to take off the mask and declare the revolution to be communist. Up to that moment, when asked if the revolution was communist, he will deny it emphatically saying that the revolution was green as the palm trees. The Cuban people, with their characteristic tendency to mockery, said the revolution was like a watermelon, green outside and red inside. In short, Castro had lied and deceived the Cuban people and this is an important part of his legacy of betrayal.

The system abolished all individual human rights: no one could comment, much less act, against the revolution. The crime of "dangerousness" was created so that citizens can be prosecuted—if these trials of predetermined end can be called prosecutions—and sentenced to jail only on a suspicion that they may incur in counter-revolutionary activities. There is no free press. The dictatorship chooses which news citizens can receive and which not. Disinformation is an important tool employed to remain in power. The inability to express opinions freely for fear of retribution leads to a double standard: one

thinks one thing and says another. Otherwise people may lose their jobs, end up in jail and make their children second class citizens in the school.

The emigration to all parts of the world of close to two millions of Cuban nationals is a dramatic expression of the desperation and hopelessness of the Cuban people. The horrible decision of leaving the country in poorly constructed boats has cost a large undetermined number of victims dying in the Florida Straight. A painful result of this massive emigration is the separation of families. So part of Castro's legacy is one of uncounted deaths and family suffering.

The US embargo – called “blockade” by the dictatorship - has failed to produce the overthrow of the regimen, but it has served it to blame the “blockade” for the economic failure of the system. In spite of the embargo, the regimen is able to negotiate with the rest of the world, and the US permits shipments of foodstuff and medicines, with the proviso they have to be paid in advance. The real reason for the deplorable state of Cuban economy is not the embargo, but the inefficiency and dramatic failure of the revolution economic policies. The economic failure is evident in the fact that Cuba survived the first 20 or 30 years as an economic satellite of the Soviet Union. When the latter disappeared the Cuban people suffered what euphemistically was called “the special period”, with shortages of the most basic items, including nutritious foodstuff which caused an epidemic of an eye illness due to deficiency of Vitamin B1. Later on when Hugo Chávez came to power, Cuba became economically dependent of oil-rich Venezuela and payed back sending healthcare workers for a miserable salary to the most inhospitable places in Venezuela. This system is used in other parts of the world disguised under the attractive propaganda of serving the poor. The regimen is paid in hard currency or oil, and in turn pays the workers a miserable salary, keeping the rest: a new form of slavery. The workers are not allowed to bring their families to discourage their defection. Cancelling the embargo will deprive the Castro regime of using it as an excuse for the economic failure of the revolution. So part of Castro's legacy is the impoverishment of the nation.

One of the so-called achievements of the Revolution is the free health care system. The reality is sad and quite different. Unfortunately there is a system of apartheid in Cuba regarding health care. There are two parallel systems: one with the most modern facilities serves the leaders of the revolution and foreigners who pay in dollars. The other, takes care of ordinary citizens with an absolute lack of even the most basic resources. Hospitals serving the common citizen lack medicines, patients have to bring their own sheets, pillows, and sometime even the food and suffer a deplorable lack of hygiene and maintenance. Foreign visitors are taken to the hospitals of the privileged, of course, selling them – and the rest of the world – the myth that those are the standards of health care in Cuba.

The other legacy Fidel Castro has left upon his death is the system of education. But this system has a price: indoctrination. Reading primers use indoctrination: F for Fidel or Fusil (rifle). In short, education is totally politicized. The mission and objectives of educational institutions at all levels is the production of “the new man”, one who follows without questioning the commands of the regimen and the communist party, even at the expense of what is good for the person or the family. The “new man” is one who has to hide their true mindset, leading to a double standard and the use of simulation and lies. It is true that the level of literacy has been greatly increased, as well as the number of university

graduates. But when these graduates try to find a job in their respective disciplines, they find the payment is very low, a maximum of around US\$20 per month. Therefore in Cuba one finds professionals working as taxi drivers or in other business related to tourism to have access to dollars, or sadly as prostitutes called "jineteras" (horse riders). Their hopelessness and desperation lead young people to think of emigrating as the only solution. The moral fabric of the common citizen has been destroyed when they have to resource to lying, simulating, stealing in their workplace or buying in the black market, to be able to "resolver" (get by). When in the future a change to a pluralistic, democratic state occurs, this Castro's legacy will be more difficult to correct than the economic ruin of the nation.

In reference to the David vs. Goliath story. It is true that the oppressive system in this small island 90 miles from the US has been able to subsist more than 50 years. But given the disastrous results of the revolution, the Cuban citizen has paid a very high price for this achievement. Castro has used this situation to his advantage. Every time there is a serious internal problem affecting the nation, Castro uses the resource of calling them to defend the revolution against an attack by "the imperialism", in this way shifting the attention of the citizens from a serious internal problem to one of a purported invasion by US forces. Internationally Castro, with his megalomaniac personality, has supported leftist armed forces in several Latin-American countries and Africa, with the end result of thousands of lost lives throughout the world.

Conclusion: the legacy of Fidel Castro is to have betrayed his people by creating a rigid communist dictatorship instead of the promised democratic nationalistic system, to have destroyed not only the economy of an up-to-then prosperous country, but also the moral and ethical values of its people, and to have caused the separation of families and the death of many of its citizens be it by fire squad, rotting in prison or succumbing in the treacherous waters of the Straight of Florida.