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Castro, socialism and the shortsighted

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How many political enemies would a dictator have to kill before you would no longer want your non-adult children to meet with him?

Sean Penn wrote a particularly mindless semi-tribute to Fidel Castro in the Dec. 3 edition of the Daily Beast, where he is far harsher on Donald Trump than on Castro. The article caught my attention because he had taken his young children to Cuba to meet Castro. He also referred to Luis Posada, “often named as the architect of the 1976 Cubana [airline] DC8 bombing” (more on that below), unfairly lumping him in with all the peaceful Miami Cubans who celebrated the death of the dictator. I assume that Mr. Penn would not have been as enthusiastic about his children meeting Hitler, Stalin or Mao (if that had been possible), because they each were responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of people, rather than just many thousands, as was Castro.

Many Castro tributes poured in from those who should have known better, such as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. In addition to all of the killings and imprisonments, Castro also deprived the Cuban people freedom of speech, of assembly, of the press and of religion, the right to travel, and to fair and free elections, among other things. His apologists say “Oh, never mind, because he improved literacy and health care.”

A few facts: Marian Tupy, who runs Cato Institute’s Human Progress Project, and who grew up in a socialist country, last week wrote: “All socialist regimes have had a two-tier healthcare system — one for the senior communist party members and one for hoi polloi. Between 1960 and 2015, life expectancy in Chile rose by 42 percent It rose in Cuba by 25 percent. If this is success, I wonder what failure looks like.”

Cuba has achieved a high literacy rate, as have most other countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, but literacy rates in the average Latin American country have grown at a faster rate than in Cuba, and without censorship.

In the 1950s, Cuba, Chile and Hong Kong were all low-income countries. Cuba still is a low-income country (with food shortages), while Chile now has approximately four times the per

capita income of Cuba, and Hong Kong has approximately eight times the per capita income of Cuba. The difference: Hong Kong has the highest level of economic freedom in the world; Chile ranks high; while Cuba is one of the least free.

Those who have praised Castro and Cuba merely reveal their own ignorance and lack of an ethical compass. Back in 1976, because of my previous leadership role in a Republican policy and research organization, I was invited by the Cuban government to put together a very small team to visit Cuba and meet with high-ranking government officials. We were supposed to fly into Cuba on Cubana Airlines Flight 455 from Kingston, Jamaica on Oct. 6. Tragically, the flight was blown up off Barbados — with the loss of 73 lives — by terrorists, a couple of hours before we were supposed to board.

The previously mentioned Luis Posada was charged with masterminding the operation but was only convicted of a lesser crime in the United States. We were told his group wished to discourage our trip (which may or may not be true), not realizing that we were going with express encouragement and guidance of the U.S. State Department.

One of our team members was a leading human rights journalist by the name of Ted Jacqueney. Ted met with some members of the Cuban underground during our trip, which motivated him to write an article about Huber Matos (Castro's highest-level political prisoner at that time). Four days after the publication of the article, Matos' brother was killed in Honduras by Castro agents, in revenge. Three years later, Jacqueney was killed in New Jersey.

Upon our return from Cuba, I wrote an article about the trip, which, before he was president, Ronald Reagan used for one of his radio commentaries (March 25, 1977). Reagan said, "The conclusion of author Rahn was the U.S. should be very slow to 'normalize' relations with Castro, especially since Castro needs better relations far more than we do. Any such agreement, Rahn says, should require an end to Cuban intervention in Latin America, compensation for the expropriation of some \$1.8 billion of property owned by Americans, and freedom to emigrate for political prisoners. I hope the State Department is listening and I'm glad I was."

The question remains, why do so many ignore the failure of socialism any time and any place that it has been tried? It is because there is widespread ignorance of both history and fundamental facts among most of those who advocate socialism. Many cannot differentiate between aspirations and what is doable, given the nature of man. And finally, most of them exhibit a very limited ability to think beyond Stage One — i.e., considering the likely secondary and tertiary responses to any political or economic policy action. In sum, their brains are immature — many grow out of it with age, but some never do.