



STUDY GUIDE

WHO IS KARL MARX?

KEY TERMS: communism
The State

regime
revolution

capitalism
dictator

NOTE-TAKING COLUMN: Complete this section during the video. Include definitions and key terms.

CUE COLUMN: Complete this section after the video.

How many people have been killed by movements self-identified as 'Marxist?'

What is Marxism, and what are its main tenets?

When did the first Marxist dictator take power?

What are the consequences of Marxism?

How much data did Marx find to prove his theories?

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Professor Kengor notes that, “Ideas have consequences. Sometimes good. Sometimes bad. And sometimes catastrophic – like the ideas of Karl Marx. ...Marx didn’t invent communism, but it was on his ideas that Lenin and Stalin built the Soviet Union, Mao built communist China, and innumerable other tyrants from the Kims in North Korea to the Castros in Cuba built their communist regimes. Ultimately, those regimes and movements calling themselves ‘Marxist’ murdered about 100 million people and enslaved more than a billion.” Do you think that Marx would be pleased with how his ideas have been put into practice? Why or why not? Do you think that in the future more narcissistic, power-hungry persons will kill and enslave vulnerable people in an attempt to begin a totalitarian regime, then attempt to justify it under the bogus pretense of doing what’s best ‘for the people’ and under other Marxist ideals? Why or why not?
- Professor Kengor then explains that, “Marx believed that workers, specifically those who did manual labor, were exploited by capitalists – the people who owned, as Marx put it, ‘the means of production’ – specifically factories – but who did very little physical labor themselves. Only a workers’ revolution, Marx wrote in *Das Kapital*, could correct this injustice.” Why do you think that Marx viewed the willing exchange of work for monetary compensation as an ‘injustice?’ Explain. Why do you think that Marx focused on confrontation as the only solution to the perceived problem? What do you think incentivized Marx to come to such egregiously incorrect conclusions?
- Explaining further, Professor Kengor shares with us that, “Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, spelled it out [how a worker’s revolution would work] point by point in *The Communist Manifesto*. It included the ‘abolition of property and inheritance’ and the ‘centralization of credit, communication, and transport in the hands of the state.’ In other words, the state owns and controls pretty much everything.” Why do you think that Marx viewed centralization and state control as the answer to worker’s woes, but ignored the likely possibility that the state would exploit workers instead of capitalists supposedly exploiting workers? Would you want the government to control almost every aspect of your life? Why or why not?
- Later in the video, Professor Kengor points out that, “Wherever Marx’s ideas were practiced, life got worse – not by a little; by a lot. There is not a single exception to this rule... Wherever Marxism goes, economic collapse, terror and famine follow. So, if cataclysmic failure – meaning terrible human suffering – is the inevitable legacy of Marxism, why do so many people – and now, especially, young people – defend it?” How would you answer Professor Kengor’s question?
- Towards the end of the video, Professor Kengor further points out that, “...Marx really had no interest in proving his theories. He knew they could be put into practice only by brute force. He said so himself. ‘Of course, in the beginning, [communism] cannot be affected except by means of despotic inroads,’ he wrote. His ends could ‘be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.’ All existing social conditions. That’s religion, family, personal possessions, freedom, and democracy. They all had to go in order to achieve Marx’s vision of an earthly paradise. But since few people give up their liberties and property voluntarily, creating a Marxist state has always required guns, prisons, and summary executions.” Considering the violence necessary in order to begin and maintain a Marxist state, what kind of people do you think support Marxism? Explain. What are the

major flaws in Marxist theory?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Cuba

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “The Failure of Communism in Cuba,” and “Cuba — A Failed Experiment,” then answer the questions that follow.

- Why does the author of the first article think that the embargo should be lifted? What happened to the Cuban people when the Soviet Union fell? Why was there an epidemic of blindness and paralysis? What did Castro do in order to ‘save socialism?’ Why are Cuban citizens forced to rely on the black market? What examples does the first author give to illustrate that Castro’s central economy is failing? What is the infrastructure and public transportation like? What old saying was the author of the second article reminded of? How many eggs per month are Cubans allowed? What were the ‘special times’ for Cubans?
- Why do you think that Marxism failed in Cuba? What do you think the worst outcomes of Marxism have been for the people of Cuba? Explain. Do you think that Cuba should become a capitalist country again? Why or why not?
- Considering that Marxist regimes always have a dictator as the central and highest power holder, why do you think that Leftists, who value equality above all else, find Marxism appealing? Can any political scheme ever achieve actual equality for absolutely everyone? Do you think that everyone, even theoretically, should try to be as equal as possible- especially in terms of personal production (work) and personal gain (wealth)? Why or why not? Why is it the case that Marxism can’t ever actually work? Explain.



QUIZ

WHO IS KARL MARX?

- 1. Under Marxism, who has all of the power?**
 - a. The working class.
 - b. The ruling elite.
 - c. The capitalists.
 - d. The business owners.

- 2. Cataclysmic failure – meaning terrible human suffering – is the inevitable legacy of Marxism.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 3. _____ became the model for dictators around the world.**
 - a. Lenin's Russia
 - b. Stalin's Russia
 - c. Marx's Germany
 - d. Castros Cuba

- 4. Marx knew that his theories could be put into practice only by _____.**
 - a. foreign policy
 - b. diplomacy
 - c. brute force
 - d. a hunger strike

- 5. Creating a Marxist state has always required _____.**
 - a. guns
 - b. prisons
 - c. summary executions
 - d. All of the above.



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<http://ashbrook.org/publications/onprin-v7n5-sheller/>

The Failure of Communism in Cuba

On Principle, v7n5

October 1999

by Glenn Sheller

On May 1, I stood in Havana's Plaza de la Revolución transfixed by my first in-the-flesh sighting of a communist autocrat. A few hundred feet away at the base of the towering monument to 19th-century Cuban nationalist José Martí, stood 71-year-old Fidel Castro.

Around me, thousands of people swirled, part of the giant street party that is the annual May Day parade in the heart of the crumbling capital of Castro's decrepit worker's paradise.

I felt I was experiencing something special, something that soon will be swept away forever. Castro was all of 31 when he seized power in 1959 and instantly became the symbol of youthful revolt that inspired the young leftists of the 1960s. His socialist Cuba was to be the model for a world that soon would be transformed by revolution.

But the young revolutionary had given way to the old man standing before me, and his revolution, once vibrant and new, was now shabby and exhausted.

Cuba no longer is a beacon to the future. Instead, it is a historical backwater in a world that has moved on, a relic of a bad idea whose time, whose century has come and gone.

The slogan "Socialism or death!" once inspired revolutionary fervor. Now it is more likely to elicit a tired and cynical, "What's the difference?"

When Castro disappears into senility or death, so will his revolution go. It is slipping away from him already.

After spending a week in Havana this spring on assignment for my newspaper, *The Columbus Dispatch*, I returned home convinced more than ever that the United States should lift the embargo against Cuba.

Not because I like Castro or Cuban communism, but because I think lifting the embargo would destroy Castro's regime.

Without the embargo to inflame Cuban nationalism and to blame for the economic failures of his revolution, Castro would be stripped of the last excuse he has for the decades of unnecessary privation and repression he has inflicted on the Cuban people.

If the U.S. embargo were lifted, the full force of American culture and commerce would hit Cuban shores like a tidal wave, sweeping away whatever loyalty to Castro and socialism remains there.

In fact, this already is happening on small scale, and the results have so alarmed Castro and his inner circle that in the past year the Cuban government has significantly tightened the screws on dissenters and independent Cuban journalists and expanded the list of crimes punishable by death.

The irony is that it was Castro himself who opened the door just a crack to freedom and unleashed forces that are trying to push it open even wider.

When the Soviet bloc dissolved at the beginning of the 1990s, Cuba suddenly lost the \$5 billion to \$8 billion in annual Kremlin aid and trade that had kept the island afloat for three decades.

Unable to produce enough food, Cuba's people began to go hungry. Without the generous Soviet oil subsidy, transportation and industry were paralyzed. Without hard currency to pay for them, no food, fertilizer or oil could be imported. Left to stand on its own for the first time in 30 years, Cuba folded.

Beginning in 1993, with people eating banana peels just to feel something substantial in their stomachs and with the populace suffering an epidemic of blindness and paralysis linked to vitamin deficiencies, Castro borrowed a page from Lenin's New Economic Policy of the 1920s and turned to capitalism to save socialism. He legalized the U.S. dollar and opened the door to small-scale private enterprise.

Farmers markets, private taxis, auto repair shops and small restaurants sprang up. Just as it did for the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, this limited opening to free markets pulled the Cuban economy out of its nosedive. Suddenly, there was food again. Not much, but enough.

At the same time, Castro intensified efforts to lure joint ventures with foreign investors, with much of that investment poured into Cuba's tourist industry, a generator of desperately needed hard currency.

Suddenly, Cubans could buy food and consumer products that hadn't been available for years. Well, some Cubans could do this, those who had access to dollars, either from relatives in the United States, or who worked in the tourist trade, serving wealthy foreigners. These lucky folk, about 81,000 of the 11 million Cubans, often make more in tips in a day than most Cubans earn in a month. That's not hard to do when the state-mandated salaries for all other Cubans, even doctors, range from \$10 to \$20 a month.

Those relying on such minuscule state salaries spend much of it buying food in private markets to supplement the inadequate rations the government provides to each Cuban.

American and European goods can be bought at special state stores that traded only in dollars. Those with only Cuban pesos in their pockets are left to press their nose against the window.

This dollar apartheid is carried further in the tourist industry. Hotels and restaurants catering to foreign tourists are off-limits to all Cubans except those employed there. Any Cuban caught trying to enter, even with an invitation from a tourist, gets the bum's rush.

My tour group's hotel, the Habana Riviera, built by American gangster Meyer Lansky in 1958, was hermetically sealed against unauthorized Cubans. Numerous security men stood at the entrance, throughout the ground floor of the hotel and especially at the lobby elevator to ensure that no Cubans got in.

One even guarded the stairway to the lower level, where the hotel restaurant laid on a smorgasbord at breakfast and dinner that included food in a variety and quality that many Cubans haven't seen, much less tasted, in years.

Naturally, the inequalities between those Cubans with dollars and those without, and between deprived Cubans and pampered foreigners, has provoked a lot of resentment in a society officially committed to egalitarianism.

Cubans squeaking by with government salaries—many of them highly trained professionals—resent their nouveau-riche comrades who earn fistfuls of precious dollars each day simply by driving a private taxi or cleaning toilets in a tourist hotel.

The incongruities that result have inspired some biting and bitter humor, such as the joke about the pathetic neighborhood blowhard who tries to impress people by telling them that he drives a taxi, when everybody knows he really is only a brain surgeon.

Alarm at this relative explosion of privately generated wealth extends into the highest reaches of the Cuban society. After Castro legalized small enterprises, the Cuban entrepreneurial spirit, crushed for more than three decades, ignited like a rocket. Soon more than 200,000 people were reckoned to be involved in private enterprise and many were making money hand over fist.

Hardliners in the Castro's inner circle demanded that such shameless prosperity be reined in. The result was a sharp increase in taxes on private enterprise, driving thousands of entrepreneurs out of business. In a recent count, the number of people officially estimated still to be active in legal private commerce had been reduced to 130,000.

Of course, this small capitalist class is probably just the visible portion of a much vaster enterprise, the underground economy. Every socialist society that has ever existed has rested on a capitalist foundation. Socialism is so profoundly inept at meeting basic material needs that citizens are forced to resort to the black market.

In Havana, the fact that a cop is stationed on virtually every block is a tacit admission of this fact. Everywhere, police stop Cubans to demand their identification and to inspect the packages they are carrying, questioning them closely about where they've been and where they're going. My tour group's government-supplied guide explained that the purpose of the cops was not intimidation of the populace, but to stop black-market activities. Perhaps one has to be a communist to understand such distinctions.

The Cuba I saw is subsisting, not prospering. Foreign investment still is estimated at \$2 billion or less since 1990. Cuba, with virtually the same land area and population as Ohio, had an estimated gross domestic product of just \$16.9 billion in 1997. Ohio's gross state product was \$342 billion in 1998.

Castro likes to blame the island's poverty on the U.S. embargo, as if Cuba cannot and does not trade with Canada, Mexico, South America, Europe and Asia. While it's true that Cuba could import many items more cheaply from the U.S. than from more distant places, such as Europe, the U.S. State Department estimates the embargo only adds about 5 percent to the cost of Cuba's imports. That seems a reasonable estimate, but even if the added cost is double that, it wouldn't explain Cuba's economic anemia. No, the real problem with the Cuba is socialism.

The condition of Havana alone speaks volumes about the bankruptcy of Castro's centrally planned economy.

Collapsed buildings and heaps of rubble can be found in every other block. Estimates of how many buildings fall down each year range from 80 to 300. On one main street, a former commercial building six or eight stories tall is a gutted shell, its roof and upper floors gone. Only the second floor remains, heaped with rubble in which palm trees have taken root and grow through window frames.

Once-magnificent buildings are pocked and stained with rust and grime, while inside, their spacious interiors have been converted to warrens of tiny apartments to provide housing for the city's 2 million residents. In many multistory apartment buildings, the elevators no longer work.

From formerly elegant balconies and windows, each family's meager laundry hangs to dry, the banners of the enthroned proletariat.

The broad boulevards that once rivaled in beauty those of any in Europe are a grimy gray and fouled by auto exhaust, some from ancient American sedans from the 1940s and '50s, the remainder from belching Soviet Ladas and Moskviches.

In a city that once was a vibrant 20th-century metropolis filled with lights and movie stars, it now is common to hear roosters crow and see wagons pulled by oxen.

In Havana and throughout the country, the infrastructure is ancient, decayed and inefficient. For example, the phone system, now being upgraded in a joint venture with an Italian company, is a relic of the 1950s, built and formerly operated by ITT.

The Partagas Cigar Factory, where some of the world's most famous cigars are made, is an ancient multi-story firetrap where 600 workers labor by hand without air-conditioning and virtually no machinery. Granted, handrolling is a plus in cigar manufacture, but even in the accounting department, the only business machine in evidence was a scabrous typewriter that looked like it hadn't been used in years. Production records were kept with pencil and paper.

The public transportation system is equally backward. Havana residents sometimes wait for hours for one of the peculiar Cuban buses, called "camels"—two semitrailers welded together and pulled by a semi tractor. There is no schedule. It is common to see scores, even hundreds of people sitting, standing and milling around a bus stop, waiting. And waiting.

Others ride bikes—tens of thousands were imported from China after the loss of the Soviet oil subsidy. Two, three, four people—in some cases an entire family—perch precariously on a single bicycle.

Cubans are proud of their ability to make do, and to repackage bane as blessing. Bicycling is not just an fuel-free form of transport, it's good for you and doesn't pollute. Lacking fertilizer, Cubans have discovered the holistic wonders of organic gardening. With medicines in short supply, herbal remedies are all the rage.

This make-do spirit is an admirable alternative to despair. And the fact is, however they may act when they're among their own, toward guests Cubans are as sunny and warm as their island. They welcome visitors, even those who have been their enemies for 40 years.

In fact, the cheefulness Cubans display toward foreigners can have a curious effect. It's easy to begin to think that perhaps things aren't all that bad on the island. It can seem that despite the poverty and the political repression, that maybe the Cubans really do have something special, a way of life that emphasizes human connections, interdependence and egalitarianism. And if that's the case, why fuss about the lack of basic freedoms?

But this attitude is condescending. It is the height of elitism for those who enjoy the freedom and affluence provided by liberal democracy and free markets to suggest that the people of Cuba or any other backward, repressive place are content with their lot and therefore have no need of the institutions of liberty.

Of course adversity can bring out the best in people, revealing unsuspected reserves of courage, resilience, ingenuity and generosity. Certainly this applies to the Cubans I met.

But it is altogether perverse to suggest that the political system that inflicts that adversity is therefore an agent of good. Castro is not a saint for imposing the privation that forces Cubans to discover the best in themselves.

And those who think Cubans are content with their lot are forgetting the tens of thousands who have set sail on rafts and inner-tubes through shark-infested waters to escape such a blessed existence.

Last year, the United States held a lottery to distribute some of the 20,000 visas allotted each year to Cubans who want to emigrate to the U.S. When officials were finished counting, they found they had 540,000 applications, equal to a quarter of the population of Havana, or one of every 20 Cubans on the island.

Yet Castro and his revolution still have a small cheering section, as I discovered after returning from Havana and writing a number of stories about Cuba for my newspaper.

Apologists for Castro take a few basic tacks. One is to divert attention to all the other nasty places in the world. One critic of my stories complained that I hadn't noted the poverty, misery and violence in Colombia. True, but I didn't visit Colombia, I visited Cuba. Beyond that, I have to wonder how the existence of nastiness in Colombia excuses the nastiness in Cuba.

The other tack is to excuse Castro because Cuba has literacy and infant mortality rates as good as those in the developed world. This is the familiar leftist double-standard. Collectivist regimes, which get most things wrong, are praised to the sky for getting a few things right. Liberal democracies, which get most things right, are utterly demonized for getting a few things wrong.

It is particularly ironic that Castro's defenders should seize on literacy and infant mortality statistics in his defense. All those who survive infancy thanks to Castro spend lives stunted by poverty and repression, also thanks to Castro. The populace may be educated, but the regime tells them what they are supposed to think, read and write.

Most fascinating among the members of the Castro fan club here in the United States is an organization called Pastors for Peace, a subsidiary of the leftist Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization.

IFCO is headed by a Baptist clergyman in New York named Lucius Walker. According to Walker, Cuba is among the most democratic societies in the world, a place where human need is put ahead of capitalist greed. If human rights sometimes are violated there, it is only because Castro feels that he is under seige from the United States, which wants to reduce Cuba once again to colonial vassalage.

Not surprisingly, Walker and Castro are pals.

Pastors for Peace organizes nationwide bus caravans each year that travel city to city to collect medicines and medical equipment, clothing and food for Cuba. The caravans then push on to Canada or Mexico, where the buses are loaded on ships bound for Havana. The next caravan is scheduled to pass through Ohio in November.

Even though it is legal for Americans to send humanitarian aid to Cuba by applying for a license from the federal government, Walker and Pastors for Peace pointedly refuse to do so, deliberately flouting the U.S. embargo.

For Walker and his supporters, the U.S. embargo is immoral and the group's disobedience is intended as a provocation to federal authorities, who so far have stopped short of prosecuting Walker or any of his followers for violations of the embargo.

Pastors for Peace relies on lefty activists and groups, some religious, some not, in scores of cities around the nation. In Columbus, where I encountered them, they met in a Presbyterian church.

There is much about the group that is admirable. They really have moved hundreds of tons of desperately needed supplies to Cuba to the undoubted benefit of thousands of ordinary Cubans, for whom toothpaste, soap and toilet paper are prized luxuries.

More than that, Pastors for Peace has done this in the face of harassment and threats from federal officials. One needn't be a lefty to agree with the group that Americans have the right to travel and trade wherever they please, short of a declaration of war by the U.S. Congress.

But what is troubling about Pastors For Peace is its hypocrisy. On the night I visited with the local chapter to talk about my trip to Cuba, the members also were reverently marking the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, several provisions of which Cuba has violated routinely for decades.

Even more disturbing is a recent Pastors For Peace newsletter that defends, even lauds, Cuba's recent imprisonment of four political dissidents who had advocated nonviolent resistance to Castro's authority, just as Pastors for Peace advocates nonviolent resistance to U.S. authority.

The newsletter argued that the dissidents deserved their prison sentences because, among other things, they encouraged Cubans to "engage in civil disobedience against the Cuban regime."

How dare they!

But I suspect Pastors For Peace will not have too many more years to exercise their political double standard. Castro is definitely old and definitely not immortal, and when he goes, everyone expects big changes in Cuba.

Cubans themselves seem to think that nothing can change until Fidel is gone. That prospect offers hope to many, but also fear that the immediate aftermath will be instability, perhaps bloody civil strife.

That's a worry shared by American diplomatic officials I spoke with, whose nightmare is a civil war in Cuba that launches thousands of rafts toward Miami.

But whether it is bloody or peaceful, change is coming to Cuba. Castro himself has unleashed it, and he and his revolution appear too old and too feeble to hold it in check much longer.

Viva Cuba!

Glenn Sheller is an editorial writer for The Columbus Dispatch.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/terry-savage/cuba----a-failed-experime_b_8556348.html

THE BLOG

11/13/2015 12:46 pm ET Updated Nov 13, 2016

Cuba — A Failed Experiment

By Terry Savage

If you ever wondered what a country would look like after 50 years of total government economic controls, you need only to make a trip to Cuba, which I did last week. The history of Cuba is a story with endless political ramifications, both for those who stayed and those who left.

That's not my area of expertise. But the economic consequences of a 50-year, totalitarian, socialistic experiment in government are obvious today. Cuba is a beautiful country filled with many friendly people, who have lived in poverty and deprivation for decades. Socialism in its purest form simply didn't work there.

I was immediately reminded of that old saying: *“Capitalism is the unequal distribution of wealth - but socialism is the equal distribution of poverty.”*

Once-magnificent buildings are literally crumbling, plaster falling and walls and stairways falling apart, as there are no ownership incentives to maintain them - or profit potential to incent their preservation. The populace is dependent on government for everything - education, health, food, and employment. But the economy is a mass of bureaucratic controls and permissions, stifling most economic growth in Cuba.

Tourism, until recently mostly from Europeans and Canadians, brings in some revenue, but not enough to run the country, or maintain its historic beauty. Yet the will of the people is evident as many do their best to grow small businesses and better their circumstances.

What Works, What Doesn't

The few things that shine in Havana are the many pre-1959 Chevrolets and Fords, lovingly maintained and used as money-making taxis by those “mini-capitalists” who own them. They are kept running by ingenuity, engine parts from other brands - and the pride of ownership, plus and the income they brings: as much as 30 CuCs per hour for a tourist ride.

(CuCs are the Cuban currency used by tourists which trade at a fixed exchange rate of 87 Cucs to 100 U.S. dollars, with the 13 percent discount collected by the government as a tax at government approved currency exchanges.)

Most people — 70 percent of the population - including doctors and lawyers - work for the government, in guaranteed jobs. Cuba is well-known for its medical training system, and actually “exports” physicians to countries like Venezuela. Those jobs come after two years of compulsory national service (three for women), and for men, two years of military service.

One of the best jobs is in a cigar factory. Those workers earn more than most doctors and lawyers, who may earn about 60 CuCs per month. The cigar-makers earn about the same, but they also get to take home 5 cigars per day - and they work shorter hours, and get two months of vacation instead of the standard one month.

The “Revolucion” brought free education, free medical care, and jobs for all. But at what cost to the country?

Every Cuban gets a ration book and an assigned “bodega” in which to purchase the low-cost, subsidized food. The one I visited looked like an empty warehouse, with little on the shelves. If the rice, beans, eggs, and cooking oil are not in stock, the shopper must return the following week. Allowed five eggs per month, the basics barely cover a starvation existence. Their remaining small incomes are spent at produce markets where they buy additional meat and vegetables when available.

Hope for the Future

Yet, the spirit of entrepreneurship survives. The best places to eat are the restaurants in private homes, known as “paladars”. There, in buildings that also house three generations of family (no one can afford to move out), the parlors and dining rooms have been turned into creative dining experiences. The proprietors source their food from the same local markets, so menus change daily depending on what is available. But the three course meals are delicious.

You are welcomed with a daiquiri or a mojito made with Cuban rum - and leave with their wishes that you will post a good rating on TripAdvisor! Though cellular access is expensive, you see a lot of smart phones - a strange contrast in cultures.

(Full disclosure: I traveled to Cuba with a gastronomic group led by the “Hungry Hound” - restaurant critic Steve Dolinsky (www.stevedolinsky.com), who arranged the restaurant visits. And since I have spoken Spanish since childhood I was able to communicate with business owners and cab drivers - all who fear government repercussions.)

The “Revolucion”

The bloody 1959 “Revolucion” expropriated the assets of American companies and wealthy Cuban citizens. It threw out the Mafia-connected leader, Fulgencio Batista, who presided over corruption and gaming, allowing the wealthy to live privileged lives. American foreign and economic policy has never forgiven the brutal actions of Fidel Castro, his brother Raoul, and Che Guevara - heroes of the Revolution.

Leave it to history to decide whether their intentions were the best for their people - but the economic results of their 50-year rule have been abysmal. Cuba became a protectorate of the old Soviet Union (remember the Cuban missile crisis) -and that worked until the early 1990s, when the USSR fell apart.

No longer receiving aid from its protector, Cuba entered a long period now remembered as “the special times” - when Cubans were literally starving, when there was electricity only two hours per day, and people turned any patch of dirt into a garden to survive. Cubans bear the scars of that terrible time, and for many the current situation is still not that much better.

Only recently, under President Raoul Castro (who will retire in 2018), have Cubans been allowed to own their own apartments (at a price set and taxed by government). But although the residents may own the apartments, the government is responsible for the structure, plumbing and electrical systems. There is little money and less incentive for repairs to these systems.

So that’s what Cuba looks like today. Many are hoping that better relations with the US will help their economy. They cheer news that US cruise ships are making application to stop in the port of Havana.

But there is still the American blockade. It means Cuba must import its main staple - rice - from Vietnam.

The irony is rich. The United States fought a war in Vietnam that cost the lives of so many young men in my generation. Today Vietnam is a thriving economy, an exporter to the US of clothing and other goods, and a tourist generation. But Cuba is still paying for the sins of its revolution.

My economic belief has long been that America's best economic (and foreign) policy is trade, fair trade, which not only enriches both sides of the transaction, but creates economic growth and a growing middle class in the countries with which we trade. We've managed to do that with previous enemies - ranging from Japan, to Vietnam, and even Russia and Iran. It's about time to end the embargo on Cuba. That's the Savage Truth.