



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on December 2, 2016

## How Castro Seized Control of Cuba

On April 9, 1948, 21-year-old Fidel Castro took part in a bloody communist uprising in Bogota, Colombia. While shouting over a seized radio station, “This is a Communist revolution,” he and his marauding comrades proceeded to murder hundreds while setting fires that claimed many more lives. Arrested and charged with murder, he boasted, “I did a good work today; I killed a priest.” But the Colombian authorities merely sent him out of their country.



Back in his native Cuba in 1953, Fidel led a band of insurrectionists in an attack on one of the country’s military posts. Arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison by the Batista government, he benefitted from a general amnesty in 1954. Castro then made his way to New York, where he met with friends who provided him with millions of dollars in aid and promises to smuggle quantities of arms into Cuba — which promises they kept.

In 1956, he went to Mexico, where he received training from die-hard communist forces who had fought in the Spanish Civil War. It was there that he met and enlisted Argentine communist Ernesto “Che” Guevara as his second in command. Before 1956 ended, the two led a band numbering less than a hundred into Cuba, established a base of operations, benefitted from a U.S. arms embargo aimed at the Batista government, and advanced toward their eventual takeover of the island nation.

In the United States in May 1957, a pro-Communist named William Wieland won appointment as the head of the State Department’s Caribbean Desk. When U.S. Ambassador to Cuba Arthur Gardner warned his superiors (Wieland certainly included) that Castro was indeed a communist, he was speedily replaced and prevented from briefing his successor, Earl E.T. Smith. To put it mildly, that constituted a highly unusual break in policy. Instead, Wieland sent Smith to Herbert Matthews at the New York Times for his briefing and Matthews, who had already been heaping praises on Castro, assured the newly appointed ambassador that Castro was a trusted friend of freedom. Nevertheless, Smith learned the truth, reported what he learned to Washington, and was likewise replaced.

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In mid-1958, former Assistant Secretary of State Spruille Braden warned, “Rebel chief Fidel Castro is a pawn in the Kremlin’s international intrigue.” Over in Mexico, U.S. Ambassador Robert C. Hill sent a similar message to Washington. But Secretary of State Dean Rusk and President John F. Kennedy vouched for the bearded revolutionary. They also did nothing to rid the U.S. government of William Wieland and his cohort, Roy Rubottom. After Castro took control of the island nation on January 1, 1959, he visited the United States, lied about his communist purposes, and won glorification from government officials and media heavyweights. Then, on December 2, 1961, he boldly confessed to having been a communist during his entire adult life. Only then did the U.S. government classify the Castro regime as an enemy.

Three months prior to Castro seizing control of Cuba, private citizen Robert Welch published the truth about the Cuban revolutionary in his small *American Opinion* magazine. He stated in September 1958,



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“Now the evidence from Castro’s whole past that he is a Communist agent carrying out Communist orders and plans is overwhelming.” Welch would later found The John Birch Society.

No one in government, Wieland and Rubottom included, ever paid any price for their treachery. Media luminaries who lauded Castro continued in their posts. But a price was paid, and is still being paid, by the Cuban people. Since the Castro takeover, thousands have been jailed or executed. More thousands have died at sea attempting to flee the Communist hellhole. In March 2016, President Obama journeyed to Cuba to start a resumption of relations with Fidel and his equally tyrannical brother Raúl. Fidel has now gone to his Maker and Raúl has continued the Castros’ tyrannical rule.

Cuba’s fate over the past 50-plus years brings to mind the adage, “Crime unpunished is crime rewarded.” The Castro brothers have never been punished. Nor have State Department officials who helped them into power and paved the way for like-minded diplomats to be their successors. A house cleaning is still very much needed.

*John F. McManus is president emeritus of [The John Birch Society](#). This column appeared originally at the [insideJBS](#) blog and is reprinted here with permission.*



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