

***War, Racism, and Economic Injustice:
The Global Ravages of Capitalism***
by Fidel Castro

Reading Program Category: Social Action
Reviewed by Liza Kittle

This book offered to United Methodist Women by the Women's Division is an incredibly egregious choice and is chillingly telling of the political viewpoints of our leadership. As one might expect, **it is a propaganda piece of the highest order from one of the most repressive leaders in world history.** This book contains selected speeches and interviews with Fidel Castro dating from early 2000 to late 2001, including some given in the United States at the United Nations and at the Riverside Church in Harlem, New York.

The editor of the book characterizes it as a “damning indictment of the present world economic and political order. In these dark times of media manipulation and U.S. hegemony, Castro's is a voice from the Third World that very much needs to be circulated.” The book calls “for fundamental transformation of the world economic and social order.” Of course, **the speeches are filled with U.S. government bashing from beginning to end and a denouncement of our capitalist economic system and our methods for addressing the war on terror. It glorifies the ideals of communism and uplifts Marxist socialism as the panacea for world order and peace.**

Does the Women's Division actually embrace the worldview of creating a socialistic, utopian society? Recommending this book would lead us to think this possible. Does the Women's Division really think that the women of the United Methodist Church could possibly benefit from a book written by Fidel Castro, one that is filled with deception, lies and propaganda? Is this an appropriate form of social action to put before the women of the church?

The Women's Division joins with many who blame the economic collapse in Cuba on the U.S. trade embargo imposed in 1960 and believe that by lifting it Castro's revolution will somehow be rescued and socialism will finally “work” in Cuba. The Hollywood elite, the international left, the liberal American academia, many U.S. media outlets and some congressional Democrats are in agreement with this assumption.

In a well researched book about Cuba by Mark Falcoff entitled *Cuba: The Morning After-Confronting Castro's Legacy*, Falcoff writes that the reality is quite the contrary. With the cessation of the \$6 billion annual subsidy Cuba received for three decades from the now dissolved Soviet Union and the near collapse of the country's antiquated sugar industry, Cuba is poorer than at any time in its modern history and unable to feed its people. He writes, “Communism has wrought enormous destruction on the island—a failing economy; widespread poverty; environmental degradation; extreme political repression; and an impoverished population with expectations of free housing, free education, and free health care.” **I would highly recommend this book for a balanced review of the complex realities that exist on the island of Cuba and the**

historical relationship between the United States and this close neighbor. Falcoff writes, “in no other country in the hemisphere has there been so consistent, so thorough and so ruthless an attempt to create utopia. Such experiments in any country exact enormous costs from its population and require elaborate rationalizations.”

Religious life in Cuba has also been repressive and complex. In 1961, Castro’s government would officially declare the country to be an atheist state. The only existing church, the Roman Catholic Church, was barely tolerated due to their opposition to Communism, and those who practiced their faith were subject to political and social persecution. In 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a resurgence of religious life especially among young people. The government eased up on the church due to the fact that they provided relief for the growing gap in social services of Cuba’s population. The Cuban constitution was changed declaring the country a ‘secular’ state rather than an ‘atheist’ state. **The government however continues to hold a repressive thumb on the church and corruption, blackmail and interference are routine in the ministry of social services and distribution of aid donations from abroad.**

The United Methodist Church have been one of the “accommodationist” denominations, a group of Protestant churches that have been accepting and some even actively supportive of the Castro regime. They are formally organized as the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC). Evangelical churches are small, a few have observer status on the Council, and tend to be apolitical. The Council supports a seminary in Matanzas, Cuba which over time has developed a theology curriculum in favor of the revolution. As Mr Falcoff reports, this trend is ironic and mirrors many similar theological institutions in the United States who also have a pro-Castro curriculum. This supportive stance caused much dissension between some of the Protestant churches in Cuba and their American counterparts, causing disconnection between some denominations.

Since 1991, all denominations have grown but statistics are hard to obtain. Independents are experiencing tremendous growth as the Cuban Council represents only 25 of 54 denominations. Many Afro-Cubans as well as the young and poor have embraced evangelical or charismatic Christianity. The CCC continues to have the support of the Castro government and the National Council of Churches, an ecumenical organization which advocates the cessation of the U.S. embargo, is supportive of the regime and refuses to criticize the political repression of Cuba’s people. Evangelical groups from America have been making trips to the island and time will tell what their continued influence will become. The Methodist Church in Cuba reports much growth and progress in Cuba, but giving the association with the CCC, one has to wonder the nature of the theological and political influence being provided by our denomination.

The Women’s Division has displayed a great deal of interest in Cuba over the past few years through various mission projects and studies on the people and life of this complex country. While the Cuba mission study was not formally reviewed by RENEW, many women have expressed concerns about some of the content. The political, theological and social worldview of our leadership historically has influenced

the content of most mission studies published by the Women's Division—studies which have a profound influence on the women of our organization. **Having a book on our Reading Program list by Fidel Castro without any disclaimer or any opposing resource is indicative of support of these radical viewpoints and shows disregard for the opinions of mainstream Christian women.** I would imagine most UMW members would not support pro-Castro causes.