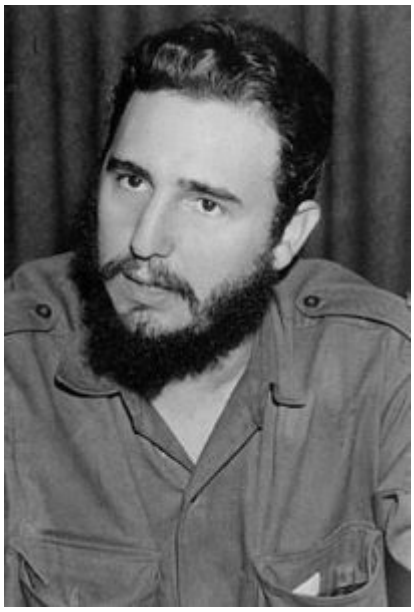
The DSA, Fidel Castro, and Cuba

written by Dan La Botz | August 21, 2026



The young Fidel Castro, 1959.

A few days ago, the Democratic Socialists of America, of which I am a member, posted a statement, the opening paragraph of which reads:

> "Today is the centenary of Fidel Castro, and the Democratic Socialists of America recognize the historic significance of both this day and the man. Fidel was an organizer, a fighter, and endures as a stalwart symbol of anti-imperialist struggle and self-determination for the Global South. DSA has a long history of solidarity with the Cuban people, their revolution, and their self-determination. We choose this historic day to recommit ourselves to acting in solidarity with the Cuban people and to starkly opposing Marco Rubio's genocidal war against the Cuban people and US imperialism writ large."

We concur with the last sentence which calls for opposition to Marco Rubio's "war against the Cuban people and U.S. imperialism writ large," (though it is not a "genocidal war)." And we agree with the statement's list of demands such as ending the blockade, stopping all forms of military threats, and normalizing relations between the U.S. and Cuba. Of course, we must stand against U.S. imperialism.

But somehow the statement neglects to mention that Castro established a Communist one-party state, of which he himself was the dictator for almost sixty years.

One has to wonder how an organization that calls itself *Democratic* Socialists of America tailed to notice the lack of democracy in Communist Cuba. As if the authors of the statement don't actually care about democracy. How can DSA oppose Trump's attempt to create a monarchy here—many DSA members marching in the "No Kings" protests—while praising Castro's monarchy in Cuba?

In 1959, as a fourteen-year-old boy, as I explained in an earlier essay, I supported the Cuban Revolution, but later became disenchanted with the revolution when Castro who was quite rightly

striving to take Cuba out of the U.S. empire then took it into the Soviet empire. Since the revolution, no political elections with opposition parties were permitted. Within a decade Cuba had assimilated to the political and economic structures of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Workers could not organize independent labor unions, and since 1960 the unions were controlled by Castro, and labor unions could not strike. The one-party state also controlled women's organizations and youth groups. No independent organization of any sort was permitted.

Social protests were forbidden and when they happened, they were repressed. DSA claims to support the Cuban people, but when in July 2021 there were national demonstrations involving thousands of Cubans who took to the streets to protest economic conditions and demand freedom, with hundreds then arrested and imprisoned, where was DSA? Why didn't it stand with the people then? As I wrote at the time, socialists, even while opposing U.S. imperialism, should have been standing with the Cuban protestors. DSA didn't. DSA supported the Cuban Communist government, not the Cuban people.

I wish I could say that this most recent DSA statement comes as a surprise or that it is an aberration, but I can't. DSA also supported the authoritarian government of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. When DSA visited Venezuela, its members fawned over Maduro and met with government officials, but not with independent labor unionists or socialists in the opposition. And some members of the DSA International Committee also pledge to "support the People's Republic of China and to promote understanding of Chinese socialism." China, of course, like Cuba is a one-party state without political democracy or labor rights.

While DSA issues statements on Venezuela and Cuba about the right of nations to self-determination and national sovereignty, sometimes joins demonstrations in support of those governments, and sends delegations to visit, DSA is not so enthusiastic about Ukraine's struggle against Russian imperialism. Ukraine has issued two statements on Ukraine, both rather ambiguous. On the one hand, DSA formally condemns the Russian invasion, but implicitly blamed NATO for causing the war. DSA emphasized peace and condemned war rather than expressing solidarity with Ukraine in its fight against Russia. Nor did DSA mention the principle that people fighting for their self-determination have a right to get arms wherever they can get them.

The DSA, and especially its International Committee, have no understanding of democracy or internationalism, and so it finds itself explicitly or implicitly supporting a series of dictators, from Castro to Maduro to Putin. And the DSA National Committee permits this, while the DSA membership seems to ignores most international questions.

But let's return to the subject of Cuba. The United States appears to be poised to take control of Cuba just as it did Venezuela in January of this year. There is speculation that Trump and Rubio might attempt to use Raúl G. Rodríguez Castro, a colonel in the interior ministry, the grandson of Fidel's brother Raúl, as their tool to administer the island on their behalf. But it is possible, that the Cuban people might take advantage of the breakdown in control by either the Cuban or the U.S. government to launch a rebellion from below, to assert both Cuba's independence and their own desire for freedom. Samuel Farber has written from a democratic socialist point of view an important article on how we on the left might respond. Future events taking place in Cuba offer the DSA an opportunity to break with its support for the Cuban Communist States and to *actually* support the Cuban people in a fight for democracy and perhaps even for democratic socialism.