

Does Pensacola Want to do Business with Castro?

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Enthusiastically endorsed by the *Pensacola News Journal*, a local delegation went to Cuba recently in the hope of drumming up business for the Port of Pensacola.

As is his wont, Fidel Castro surprised the visitors by requesting to join them for lunch one day. According to retiring State Representative Jerry Maygarden, a member of the delegation, "it was one of those really rare moments that I wouldn't ever want to miss." After all, Castro has been "on the world stage a long time." What a thrill!

Perhaps it is too much to expect even a seasoned politician like Mr. Maygarden not to go starry-eyed and weak at the knees in the presence of such a "celebrity." But does he and the rest of the delegation, and do the editorial writers of the *Pensacola News Journal*, know what kind of man and regime it is that they are dealing with?

Since seizing total power in Cuba in 1959, Fidel Castro has successively aligned himself with every enemy of the United States. In the midst of the October, 1962 Cuban missile crisis Castro urged Moscow to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike against America. During the Vietnam War, his henchmen joined in the torture of American POWs. Castro has consorted with Libya's Khaddafi, Panama's Noriega, Colombia's cocaine kings, and assorted international terrorists. He blasted the U.S. during the Gulf War and denounced NATO during the air campaign against Belgrade. As recently as last year Castro visited Teheran, where he declared that the Iranian and his regime together would bring the United States "to its knees."

At home Castro rules a police state repeatedly condemned by the United Nations Human Rights Commission. During the life of the regime more than 10,000 Cubans have been executed, and hundreds of thousands imprisoned. Merely circulating a copy of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights is punishable by a prison term.

There are no labor unions, commercial enterprises, or trade or industrial associations outside the control of the Communist Party. All are infiltrated by the political police (no doubt Mr. Maygarden unknowingly shook hands with one or more members of state security, the kind of people that sully their hands torturing political prisoners). Except for church publications of restricted circulation, all media are integral parts of the party-state; there are no independent schools, universities, or cultural associations.

But suppose none of this is the Pensacola delegation's concern; nor of the *Pensacola News Journal*, which seldom, if ever, mentions any of the regime's unsavory

aspects in its news or editorial pages. Let us assume that all that the delegation and the newspaper's editorialists are interested in is the Port of Pensacola bottom line. In that case, they better hold on to their wallets, or rather to that of the taxpayers, for the regime they are so anxious to do business with is bankrupt, habitually buying goods and services on credit with no intention of making good on its debts.

Cuba is in default of more than \$10 billion to Western creditors. According to a Reuters report cited by a University of Miami study, the Castro regime "is notorious for paying its debts late . . . and public and private creditors report that the situation has grown much worse in recent months."

This, then, is what the Pensacola delegation, and the *Pensacola News Journal*, hope to do business with: a regime ruled by a tyrant, an enemy of the United States in word and in deed, that is in default to the rest of the world. Is this any way to do business? Is this what the people of Pensacola want?