Walter E. Williams: Are we really that far from conditions that brought Hitler to power?

In Europe, especially in Germany, hoisting a swastika-emblazoned Nazi flag is a crime. For decades after World War II, people have hunted down and sought punishment for Nazi murderers, who were responsible for the deaths of more than 20 million people.

Here’s my question: Why are the horrors of Nazism so well-known and widely condemned but not those of socialism and communism? What goes untought – and possibly is covered up – is that socialist and communist ideas have produced the greatest evil in mankind’s history. You say, “Williams, what in the world are you talking about? Socialists, communists and their fellow travelers, such as the Wall Street occupiers supported by our president, care about the little guy in his struggle for a fair shake! They’re trying to promote social justice.” Let’s look at some of the history of socialism and communism.

What’s not appreciated is that Nazism is a form of socialism. In fact, the term Nazi stands for the National Socialist German Workers’ Party. The unspeakable acts of Adolf Hitler’s Nazis pale in comparison with the horrors committed by the communists in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the People’s Republic of China. Between 1917 and 1987, Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin and their successors murdered and were otherwise responsible for the deaths of 62 million of their own people. Between 1949 and 1987, China’s communists, led by Mao Zedong and his successors, murdered and were otherwise responsible for the deaths of 76 million Chinese. The most authoritative tally of history’s most murderous regimes is documented on University of Hawaii professor Rudolph J. Rummel’s website and in his book “Death by Government.”

How much hunting down and punishment have there been for these communist murderers? To the contrary, it’s acceptable both in Europe and in the U.S. to hoist and march under the former USSR’s red flag emblazoned with a hammer and sickle. Mao Zedong has been long admired by academics and leftists across our country, as they often marched around singing the praises of Mao and waving his little red book, “Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung.” President Barack Obama’s communications director, Anita Dunn, in her June 2009 commencement address to St. Andrews Episcopal High School at Washington National Cathedral, said Mao was one of her heroes.

Whether it’s the academic community, the media elite, stalwarts of the Democratic Party or organizations such as the NAACP, the National Council of La Raza, Green for All, the Sierra Club and the Children’s Defense Fund, there is a great tolerance for the ideas of socialism – a system that has caused more deaths and human misery than all other systems combined.

Today’s leftists, socialists and progressives would bristle at the suggestion that their agenda differs little from those of Nazi, Soviet and Maoist mass murderers. One does not have to be in favor of death camps or wars of conquest to be a tyrant. The only requirement is that one has to believe in the primacy of the State over individual rights.

The unspeakable horrors of Nazism didn’t happen overnight. They were simply the end result of a long evolution of ideas leading to consolidation of power in central government in the quest for “social justice.” It was decent but misguided earlier generations of Germans – who would have cringed at the thought of genocide – who created the Trojan horse for Hitler’s ascendance. Today’s Americans are similarly accepting the massive consolidation of power in Washington in the name of social justice.
If you don’t believe it, just ask yourself: Which way are we headed tiny steps at a time – toward greater liberty or toward more government control over our lives?

Perhaps we think that we are better human beings than the German people who created the conditions that brought Hitler to power. I say, don’t count on it.