

CUBA AT THE LIGHT OF REALITY

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A DICTATOR'S ERRORS

The principal problem that encircles the Cuban enigma is the insistent, persistent and permanent insistence of Castro as the head of nation. For those who do not know, Fidel Castro has, in his hands, five high powers in Cuba. Castro is president of the Ministerial Advisory Board, Prime Minister, President of the Advisory Council of the State, Secretary General of the Cuban Communist Party and Commander-in-Chief of the army. To all this, we have to add the Legislative, Judicial, and Executive Powers concentrated in his hands; in effect, all institutions and organizations are under the control of the State, which is to say in the hands of Fidel Castro Ruiz. No one makes any move behind his back.

As a poet, writer and journalist in my country, I lived the experiences of the transformations created by a successful revolution in 1959 under the direction of a leader turned, sadly, into a tyrant over the same people that admired, trusted and helped him. Castro surprised many when he declared Communism to be the official

ideology of the state; but many had already warned of his true intentions, although he always denied he was a Communist to both the public and the press. With his stern face he said the following at his trial after Commander Huber Matos accused him of being a traitor.

"Because it's enough, it's a very comfortable position to stand here and accuse the revolution of Communism. When has anyone seen me lie to the people? Who has seen our government to be based on secrets kept from the public?"

(Havana, December 14, 1959).

We can say this was the great virtue of Castro: his capacity to lie to and trick people. I was also his victim.

I put my pen and my labour to the service of his swindler and censor of liberties until I opened my eyes to reality. I refused to believe the truth until I received, on my flesh, the disgrace of his whip and went to prison for daring to ask for liberty and democracy in the 1992 elections. "NO POR CASTRO, VOTE POR LA LIBERTAD" – No to Castro, vote for liberty – were my words, distributed in pamphlets. My son, 22, and I were sentenced to 10 years in prison for this crime.

Castro cannot be criticized or shown errors in his way. In Cuba, one cannot freely express opinions that diverge from the official Communist party line. Castro is a person who has committed and continues to commit many errors. He criticizes those

within his government who err. He speaks openly of everyone else's shortcomings and has gone so far as to execute his friends for this, as is well known. But never has he talked about, in any declaration, any of his own mistakes. He has never admitted, for instance, his mistake of eliminating the farmers' markets that distributed food to the nation, having to reinstate them after the Soviet Union's collapse, where the Cuban economy had been completely intertwined in the arms and tentacles of the Soviet imperial system. Yes, the Soviet imperial system, because this is what Castro's government literally did: move us from the hands of American imperialism and into the hands of Russo-Soviet imperialism, in complete contradiction of our hero of Cuban independence, Jose Marti.

Some may say that Castro has done good things with regards to health and education, by giving free medical attention and education to the people. But Marti, our national hero, our apostle of independence, liberty and democracy, said that tyranny is one in its various forms, even when dressed in beautiful names or great works; Marti further wanted Cubans, "...to express their frank and free opinions on anything and that these opinions be respected. Because if, of all my country's benefits, I had to choose one right above all else, I would pick a healthy fundamental that would be the principle

and basis of the country's political discourse: I would like the first law of our country to be the homage of men, and homage to the dignity alluded to in the terms political liberty and freedom of expression".

(From Marti, "Con todos y para el bien de todos" – With and For the Well-Being of All)

In any case, there has never been nor is there anything free in Cuba. The people have had to pay a very high economic and moral price. The Soviet Union gave Castro a subsidy of \$4 to 5 billion annually to train Cubans for the Guerras Internacionalistas (international Warriors), directed by Castro from his throne in Havana, so that Cubans could die overseas. Cuba lived from the Soviet subsidy. But no social revolution not based on solid economic ground can survive. It is a sad story, that my people before Castro, and after, with Castro staggering and foolish, contradictory and erratic in his alienation of power, but that is how he is: very authoritarian and dangerous even towards his own friends and terribly cruel towards his enemies.

There are the testimonies written by political prisoners. They are their own declarations. In almost 40 years, Castro has never signed a political amnesty. There is Mario Chanes de Armas', the longest political prisoner in the world who spent 30 years in Castro's prisons after being an attacker in the Cuartel Moncada (Moncada Quarter) and for being a combatant of

the Gramma and the Sierra Maestra alongside Fidel. There is the testimony of Armando Valladares, Carlos Alberto Montaner, Boffils. Also Huber Matos, whose writings provided a chilling and accurate prediction of what life under Castro would be like when he wrote from prison.

"I have not been permitted to say anything, or speak to lawyers or journalists, to write I have to trick the guards, who never lose sight of me. Is this what we fought for in Cuba? It is treason to think and speak without hypocrisy the teachings of Marti? I pass time reading the book *Between Liberty and Fear* by G. Areiniega and I see Fidel walking down the road to tyranny, if he hasn't arrived there already, with the danger of a teacher to inflame the population. How mistaken we were to think we were disciples of Marti".

(From *Declarations by Castro*, published in December 1959. Castro used fragments of his letter to accuse Matos of treason and condemn him to 20 years of prison).

In the light of the actual events Castro was mistaken. His practices and history have put him in financial difficulty and ridicule. He was mistaken with the Zafra of the 10 millions, thereby ruining with this absurd idea the sugar industry. He was mistaken when he wanted to plant rice in the Cienaga de Zapata. He was mistaken with the cord agriculture of Havana, with the farmers' market, with the dollar, with the paralyzation of the tourist industry, with

Angola and the international Wars, with the persecution of youth who dressed like the Beatles, with his conception of the New Man, with the Concentration Camps where dissidents and homosexuals were imprisoned for forced labour, with respect to religion and liberty, and with the Pope; in short, he was mistaken with the selection of Communism as an ideology. Castro is a man who has committed so many errors that he is no longer a man who commits errors; he is an error.

THE POPE DEFEATS THE DICTATOR

Communists, in their doctrines and postulates, have always affirmed their opposition to religion and have presented a vicious and violent attack against any religious manifestation or practice. This is the declaration of Communistic atheism. Cuba has not been an exception. Since Castro declared the socialist character of the Cuban revolution in 1961, vilely tricking his followers in the process, he has persecuted all religious in all spheres and institutions of national life.

Castro concentrated his disintegration energy specifically on the Catholic Church, although he also persecuted Jehovah's Witnesses fiercely. They refused to pay homage to any symbol of the State, the party or the revolution, as they worshiped only God. The tyrant could not accept this. Many went to prison for their refusal to worship the leader,

the Commander - In - Chief Castro who declared these religious types to be authentic counterrevolutionaries, worthy of public repudiation.

I lived these experiences. I was baptized by the Catholic Church, I had my first communion, and went to mass frequently; but later I began to collide against the new political realities, which had implanted atheistic Communism in my country. I wanted to continue my university studies, but I was faced with the dilemma that my faith would prevent me from enrolling. In an interview of ideological analysis before several militant communists. I tried to be convincing about the question of my faith in God.

I responded by writing, as it was not enough just to say it, that when I was a child I believed in God, but now I believe in Marx and Lenin. It appears I convinced them using this manner because I was allowed in and able to finish my education. I also participated in everything, from cutting sugar canes on vacation time to military training. If I didn't do all this, I could be accused of being an enemy and expelled. Yet, even at that time, I was convinced of the erroneous path of the Cuban revolution, in which most of us had put a little faith.

"God forgive me." I later said in my heart. "I had to do it so I could study in university." At that time, I knew very little about Marx and Lenin. I had to fake a moral code to survive. Many youth had the same

experience. This is how national morality is contaminated with embarrassment.

Over many years, the Catholic Church in particular was persecuted and intimidated, as it had demonstrated a fierce resistance to the abuses of the authoritarian Communism. Churches were closed, and all those who insisted on religious practices were marginalized and discriminated against. Many priests were deported, and nuns who helped the poverty-stricken areas disappeared. Castro closed all Catholic schools, recognizing only public schools that disseminated Marxist-Leninist doctrine. He refused to acknowledge the requests of Pope John Paul II to visit Cuba and offer his voice of peace and reconciliation. The attacks against the Church by Castro were constant and highly offensive.

The disintegration of international Communism (and the Cuban economy) and the accumulation of evidence of the need for change all had to occur before Castro, against his will, could accept certain economic transformations (which I and others describe as opportunistic and demagogical. They are not from the dictator's conscience, but are necessary to give Castro's power more oxygen). Castro has always been, and continues to be, a perennial contradiction. He continues to say at the end of any discourse the redundant phrase "Socialism or Death" (two things that are the same). With this he continues

to threaten the population, while allowing in the and specific business operations and investments from ambitious foreign capitalists. Everything is a perennial contradiction in Cuba.

Finally Castro accepted the entry of the Pope when there was no other alternative. Cuba is the only country in the hemisphere the Pope had never visited. It's the country that saw the obligation to change (opportunistically) the atheistic character of the Constitution to a layman one. Castro wants to give the impression that things are changing. False. He is only a tyrant who wants to win some time and space for his power. He is the tyrant who thinks himself indispensable, with the right to fix the bridges he himself destroyed.

But Castro wanted to prepare the land, and in an announcement to the nation announcing the visit of the Pope, said that this should be seen as a triumph of the revolution. But he is fooling no one with this cynicism. The visit of the Pope is a devastation of the Communist revolution, a devastation of the dictator who is stubborn about changing the name of everything and makes idiots still believe in a reality that exists only in his perverse imagination.

The Pope took to Cuba a message of peace and reconciliation. He asked for the celebration of Easter. He asked for the freedom of political prisoners. One can still hear the chants of "Liberty" by the people in a

Plaza de la Revolución (Plaza of the Revolution) converted into a gigantic church that gave shelter to half a million Cubans, believers and non-believers alike. The acclamations of "The free Pope wants to see us all free" that circulated in the people when the Pope talked about democracy, liberty and respect for human rights still make their rounds. The Pope said, "Cuba needs to open itself to the world, and the world to Cuba."

The Pope talked about the union of family. He said the Cuban family is divided in a forced exile that grows daily, and proclaimed, "Cuba cuida tu familia para que conserves tu corazón" — Cuba, watch your family to conserve your heart. The Pope cited the words of Jose Marti, our apostle of liberty, tolerance, political liberty and democracy. In the process of constructing a future with everyone for the well-being of everyone, Marti expressed that the family, school and the Church must form an educative community where the sons (and daughters) of Cuba can grow in humanity. The Pope could not be clearer in his protocol. I imagine the tyrant trembling of impotence against these truths, against the realities provoked by his erratic politics and mistakes.

On balance, the positive consequences of the Papal visit to Cuba far outweigh the negative. Without a doubt, the Pope has devastated with simple and profound words, with his prayers of peace and truth, with his charismatic figure the moribund dictator,

to penetrate deeply into the popular conscience, to mark significant changes in Cuban morality. The people will begin to react without fear like the Pope asked. Despite the repressive machine that was there before and after the visit, the people collectively breathed, in the plazas of the historical masses, the first breath of liberty in almost 40 years of totalitarian Communism imposed on the nation. This can never be forgotten.