



Puente Democrático

Latino-Cuban Dialogue

January 2013

Latino-Cuban Dialogue is a quarterly publication (**in Spanish**) of the Program of International Democratic Solidarity (Puente Democrático) of the Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL), with the objective of generating an exchange of ideas between figures of civil society, academics and analysts of Latin America and actors of the Cuban civil movement, that will help to reflect on distinct themes that contribute to a scenario of political opening and democratic transition in Cuba.

This annual edition of 2013 in English gathers a selection of the 6 articles published in this period. In this regard, we have chosen two topics covered during 2013. One is the proposal of the Argentine journalist and lawyer **Aleardo Laría**, who was exiled politically in 1977, recommending the adoption of a parliamentary system of government with a stage of democratic transition in Cuba. From Havana, journalist, writer and former political prisoner **Jorge Olivera Castillo**, prevented from leaving the country, answered this pose.

Another issue that was highlighted during 2013 was the role of Latin America's democratic left in the light of the political situation in Cuba. Therefore, **Manuel Cuesta Morúa**, spokesman for Progressive Arc, writes from Havana that "for sectors of the left, basic liberties do not form a fundamental part of the structure of social coexistence in their model of modernity, but rather are an instrumental inheritance that is disposable once their supposedly just and revolutionary societies are installed. For them, Cuba was and con-

tinues to be the future". From Buenos Aires, historian and political scientist **Fernando Pedrosa**, author of "The Other Left: Social-Democracy in Latin America" (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2012) writes that "In a way, the Cuban revolution forged the radical left in Latin America, and this influenced numerous groups and leaders both during the Cold War, and afterwards. Many of them, today distanced from radical politics, maintain through the Cuban situation one of few political links with their youthful past. There is an idealized, naive and yet also cynical view, which sustains a discourse where reality and narrative share no points of contact". In his turn, Professor of Literature **Rubén Chababo**, who directs the Museum of Memory in Rosario, highlights that "At this point in the 21st century, after so many reports from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and so many other organization that in the past denounced the violence carried out by Latin American authoritarian regimes, it should not be necessary to keep trying to convince people that what has been happening in Cuba for decades is a dictatorship". Finally the renowned historian **Luis Alberto Romero** answers from Buenos Aires the interpellation Morúa Cuesta.

This publication is expected to reach a wider audience, interested in issues of Latin America and Cuba in particular, hoping to arouse the interest of adding more voices and new topics to this dialogue between Latin Americanists and the Cuban democratic movement.

Gabriel C. Salvia, Editor

Cuba's institutional future

It is difficult to characterize the institutional regime that currently prevails in Cuba. If we consider the formal constitution – that is, the current constitutional text as represented by the Constitution of 1976 – we could characterize the Cuban regime as a parliamentary system that has renounced the traditional presidentialism of the Americas. Nevertheless, the distortion created by the absolute institutional preeminence of the Communist Party removes any possibility of drawing analogies with the prevailing systems of government in Western democracies.

In theory, the National Assembly of People's Power – which represents and expresses the sovereign will of the entire people – is the supreme organ of State power. The National Assembly of People's Power elects, from among its deputies, the Council of State, integrated by a President, a First Vice-president, five Vice-presidents, a Secretary and a further 23 members. The President of the Council of State is head of State and head of Government. The Council of State is responsible to the National Assembly of People's Power and accountable to it for all of its activities. It has a collegiate nature and, for domestic and international purposes, is the supreme representation of the Cuban state.

Nevertheless, as indicated by the very Constitution, the Communist Party of Cuba, “a follower of Martí's ideas and of Marxism-Leninism”, is “the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation” and “is the highest leading force of society and of the state, which organizes and guides the common effort towards the goals of the construction of socialism”. This pre-eminence of one party leads to an institutional duality, investing superpowers in the President of the Council of State who tends to also be the Secretary-General of the Communist Party.

Any process of democratization that, as a minimum, allows for the possibility of action by diverse political parties that compete in free elections would presuppose the disappearance of the current dual institutional structure. But then it would be appropriate to ask what institutional system might be sufficiently attractive for the new generations that aspire to rediscover democracy in Cuba.

A return to the Constitution of 1940 could be one of the options. It is a modern constitution that establishes a presidential system, mitigated by the fact that the Executive Power “is exercised by the President of the Republic with the Cabinet”. The President of the Republic

By **Aleardo F. Laría**

Lawyer and journalist, born in General Roca, province of Río Negro. He studied law at the University of La Plata, where he participated in the founding of the FURN (University Federation of the National Revolution), a university pool where Nestor Kirchner would also serve later. In the province of Río Negro he was leader of the Peronist Youth ascribed to the so-called “revolutionary tendency” and later lawyer of the Workers' Union Fruit Packers. In 1977 he was forced into exile in Spain. There he served as counsel for the General Workers Union, linked to the Spanish Socialist Workers Party. He is Deputy Director of the newspaper “Río Negro”. As a political scientist, he has written two essays where he criticizes the presidential system and calls for the implementation of a parliamentary system, “Calidad Institucional y Presidencialismo: los dos problemas no resueltos de Argentina” and “El sistema parlamentario europeo. Las ventajas del parlamentarismo” both published by the Latin American Editor Group. His latest book is an extended essay on “La religión populista: una crítica al populismo posmarxista”.

is directly elected by citizens with universal suffrage. The President is able to freely name and remove Government ministers, later accounting to Congress for these decisions.

According to that constitutional text, the president of the Republic will, in the exercise of Executive Power, be assisted by the Cabinet of Ministers, integrated by the number of members determined by the law, one of which will hold the position of Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers are responsible for their acts of government before the House and the Senate, who are able to bestow or retire their confidence in the Prime Minister, individual Ministers or the entire Cabinet, proposing a vote of confidence that requires a majority of half plus one in each chamber for its approval.

We think that, notwithstanding the merits of the 1940 Constitution, a return to a presidential system presents all the risks of personalistic government, amply demonstrated by the historic reality of Latin America. To achieve a parliamentary system, similar to the European model, it would be enough to modify the Constitution of 1940 in the following aspects: 1) It should be established that the Prime Minister and Cabinet of Ministers be designated by the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) rather than by the President as established in the current text. The Chamber would retain the power to dismiss them through a motion of censure. 2) It would be appropriate to eliminate the popular election of the President to avoid competition with the Prime Minister. It would be necessary to design a presidential electoral system similar to that of Germany: a wide assembly that guarantees the election of a sufficiently impartial person who is above partisan struggles.

Cuba will not delay much longer before introducing democracy. It would be desirable for the country to use the most modern institutional forms that support stable governance. In our opinion, a model based on the European parliamentary system offers sufficient guarantees to avoid the risk of collapse into personalistic, populist government.

Any process of democratization that, as a minimum, allows for the possibility of action by diverse political parties that compete in free elections would presuppose the disappearance of the current dual institutional structure. But then it would be appropriate to ask what institutional system might be sufficiently attractive for the new generations that aspire to rediscover democracy in Cuba.

Cuba: Institutions in Perspective

The article written by Argentine journalist and lawyer, Aleardo F. Laría, on the institutional future of Cuba must be considered an objective approach to political reality on the island.

Its foundations, elaborated with a laudable power of synthesis, provide the best means by which to approach the complex problems sure to emerge when the time comes to form a post-authoritarian government in Cuba.

It is also valuable because it has been written with a view to suggest rather than impose, something that should contribute to widen its appeal to those people, both within and outside the country, who are concerned with giving a good start to the new institutional framework that will emerge from the evolution or fall of the current regime.

Certainly, the best option will be a change from the current parliamentary system, which is in practice no more than an insipid body disposed to validate all the directives of the single party, in favor of one where the diverse political tendencies represented in it can exercise their functions in a responsible way.

A presidential system would entail greater risk, beyond the regeneration of caudillismo with rising populism. It would increase tensions in a socio-political scene that has lacked any democratic example for more than half a century, something that should not be left unconsidered in the institutional architecture of a pluralist system based in the consolidation of the rule of law.

The use of the Constitution of 1940 for these purposes may be viable. This, the Carta Magna could, with modifications, perhaps be converted into the legitimating document for a process sure to be begin in the next five years.

In any case, it seems to me that in facing such a problem, we cannot ignore the characteristics of the end of a revolutionary model that in fact ceased to be revolutionary in the second half of the 1960s.

The phenomenon of ungovernability may emerge if the ends are not well tied up from the beginning. The loss of civic referents for so long and the repressed desire for protest against the status quo are among a number of causal elements capable of leading to anarchy.

Currently, lack of social discipline and multi-faceted turmoil are

By Jorge Olivera Castillo

Poet, writer, editor and television journalist who lives in Havana. In May 1993 he left his job as editor of the official television due to pressure from the political police. Thereafter he was a part of the independent trade union Confederation of Democratic Workers of Cuba. In 1995 he joined the independent news agency Havana Press, and was its director from 1999 until 2003 when he was arrested and sentenced to 18 years in prison in the events of the Black Spring of Cuba, during 75 dissidents were imprisoned. After serving 20 months and 18 days he was granted a parole health. He has published poetry "Confesiones antes del crepúsculo", "En cuerpo y alma" and "Cenizas alumbradas", plus the books "Huesped del infierno" and "Antes de que Amanezca y otros relatos".

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widespread, an indicator that the task to be addressed will not be easy.

The footprint of castrismo will last well beyond its end. It is worth underlining that five generations have been affected by a model which created ideal conditions for the systematization of the double moral (double standard), corruption, and violent rejection of opinions opposed to the parameters established by those in power, among a series of other vices that are perfectly visible from any angle of reality.

In conclusion, we hope that the transition to a democratic society is the least traumatic possible, but this depends on many factors that escape even the most perceptive.

I do not think transition will occur while Fidel and Raúl Castro possess the necessary faculties to continue leading the socialism they founded against the grain of the historic and cultural trends of the Cuban nation.

Only the death or mental incapacitation of both will afford the opportunities for Cuba to finish opening to the world, in line with the desire expressed by His Holiness John Paul II in 1998, during his papal visit to the island.

In 2013, it is still difficult to see the glimmers of light at the end of the tunnel. Despite the delay, one day democracy will no longer be an unknown term for the Cuban people.

Hopefully, the context will provide the tools for the job and a parliamentary system, like that proposed by Mr Aleardo F. Laría, can be forged.

But for now political change is outside the realm of possibility. In the elite agenda there are only unenthusiastic movements towards economic opening.

Perhaps they dream of articulating a tropical version of the Chinese model. This would be to give further twists to a tree that was born crooked.

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Cuba and the Latin American democracies

Cuba is a sign that Latin American democracy remains weak in many ways. There is no doubt that in the southern hemisphere, counting within it the Caribbean islands, democracy is the fundamental benchmark for citizens and institutions as much as for the State; nevertheless, it is even more certain that the political, diplomatic and geopolitical dynamics of the region constrain the possibilities that public behaviors will respond to benchmark concepts.

The political patronage systems (clientelismo) of the elites and the populism of both States and significant social groups, together with the historic anti-Americanism of the region, combine to postpone any integrated defense of the hemisphere's democratic values. Thus the proof of democratic weakness is found not in the failings of institutions or in their social and cultural precariousness (which some call the adolescence of Latin American democracy), but in the region's inability to make values prevail throughout the hemisphere. It is interesting because Latin America is the only 'value space' where a permanent tension exists between the fundamentals that constitute that space and public commitment to the institutions that give those fundamentals life. In Africa there is no ambivalence. Dictatorships are dictatorships without dissimulation.

The tendency exists to blame this lack of hemispheric commitment to democratization in Cuba on the Latin American left, in both its social and political incarnations (the latter further divided into its two most important levels, intellectual and governmental/state-based).

This tendency is well supported by the evidence. Since its appearance, the revolutionary or Christian left in our region has been democratic by impotence, if at all. It had to suffer brutal violations of its rights at the hands of right-wing dictatorships for the idea of human rights to enter even weakly into its ideological DNA. Its adherence to the values associated with individual liberties has consequently been more a negative than positive commitment. These values have been brandished as indispensable tools in the development of societies in which fundamental rights will, nevertheless, not occupy a position of high priority in the public agenda. Such that, for sectors of the left, basic liberties do not form a fundamental

By Manuel Cuesta Morúa

Historian, political scientist and essayist. He is the spokesperson of the social democratic Arco Progresista party (which participates in the Socialist International as an observer). He is the coordinator of Concertación Nuevo País. He has written numerous essays and articles, published in various Cuban and foreign journals, and participated in national and international events.

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part of the structure of social coexistence in their model of modernity, but rather are an instrumental inheritance that is disposable once their supposedly just and revolutionary societies are installed. For them, Cuba was and continues to be the future. And we should understand that the matter has nothing to do with the Cuban economic model, which everybody knows is a disaster, but rather with the political and social model, which is supposed to be viable with certain corrections to its rigid populism.

Democracy is, to the revolutionary and Christian left, more an imposition of reality than a political project. And this left has developed hegemony over the democratic left, that which associates individual liberties with social equity. The latter represents a minority and has only rarely achieved State power, except in Costa Rica. In any case it has lived with a permanent complex of being insufficiently revolutionary – as though revolution were the natural condition of Latin American politics – and constantly seeks to avoid its rhetorical link with the United States.

If this left has evolved within certain countries, this concept of the left has not enjoyed the same evolution at a hemispheric level. The Chilean Socialist Party had a strong revolutionary agenda that linked it to the Cuban Communist Party, an agenda that was moderated by force after the Pinochet period and now leads it to venture an intermittent criticism of the lack of liberties in Cuba. But the Cuban myth rotates through the region and grows stronger in democratically weak countries. After Chile, Brazil, and after Brazil comes Venezuela mounted upon a mythic pedestal from which the social and intellectual left of Argentina and Uruguay draws its life.

The interesting thing here is that criticism of the Cuban government from the left is found in countries of greater democratic firmness or that are heading towards a model of strong democracy. Where democracy is weak, as in the ALBA countries, or semi-weak, as in Colombia or Guatemala, criticism of the lack of freedom in Cuba is non-existent or evasive.

The matter seems to be related more to the depth of democracy in distinct countries than with the ideology of certain political sectors, although this too is fundamental. A powerful Brazil, singularly arrogant, is an example of certain importance. Neither Lula nor Rouseff have any commitment to Cuban democracy, but neither did the governments of Sarney or Cardoso. This is precisely because Brazil is still a country in transition that is coming out of a model of weak democracy, despite all its experiments.

But Brazil's importance resides in its centrality both as a nation and as a dual model. It seems to be an imitable leftist project and a model of alternative development. Both concepts are being con-

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tested by the Brazilian citizens and reflect, in what concerns Cuba, how the lack of commitment by Latin American governments to democracy in my country translates the weakness in their democratic behavior towards their own societies. If Brazilian society surprises a Brazilian state that claims to be managing a leftist agenda, it is because the Brazilian left, when in power, reproduces the imperialist logic of the revolutionary left, in a country with an imperialist past and imperialist pretensions that are difficult to mask behind progressive politics: in this model of development the people are a client, leaving hunger behind with the help of the State.

For Brazil, its political diplomacy, once limited to Latin America, now stretches to the Caribbean following two apparently contradictory logics: that of an emerging economic power and of a regional geopolitical power. Neither of the two perceives democratic values as anything more than verbal solutions within the correct modern rhetoric. And Brazil sets the Latin American standard.

Who should we, the Cuban democrats, direct ourselves to in this scenario? It seems we cannot work with supposedly democratic governments. My thesis is that Latin American governments have yet to comprehend those strongly democratic concepts that see the governed as citizens and as the source of political legitimacy. As societies open and the citizenry grows in its multiple forms, Latin American governments (with only two or three exceptions) are closing themselves off as corporative groups behind the traditional curtain of populism. Their problem with the press is an unmistakable sign of this incapacity to adopt and stimulate those strong democratic concepts. The ideological progressiveness of some of them seems no more than a maneuver by certain elites to get ahead of and coopt, from within the state, the self-emancipation of the citizenry driven above all by networks and greater social mobility. That progressiveness is nothing but a new social conservatism, which finds it seriously difficult to live fully together with freedom. No culturally serious democrat is offended, for example, by the real or supposed defamation of the press.

My final opinion, then, is the following: we Cuban democrats must connect with that rich plurality of Latin American civil society that revitalizes rights and freedoms. A certain Statist vision leads us to see the ultimate destination of our political efforts as beneficial contact with representatives of the State. That could be the case with those democracies that prioritize their citizens, but not with those democracies that have only the pueblo – the masses – as their subject. In the latter, the democratic examples to follow are not to be found in power but in the society. Is Lula, for example, really a democrat?

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The democratic Left and Cuba: History of a misunderstanding

By Fernando Pedrosa

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Manuel Cuesta Morúa’s article offers a very interesting question for debate: why did the democratic left support (and, in some sectors, continue to support to this day) the Cuban government in spite of its anti-democratic policies and constant human rights violations?

Below I will develop and suggest some possibilities and hypotheses that may support a continued debate around the theme suggested by Cuesta Morúa, and that are key in the moments we are living (and surely will live) around a future political transition in the most famous island of the Caribbean. I will divide them in three groups.

1 – International activity of the Cuban government

The Castro regime knew how to gain the most benefit from the bipolar context of the Cold War. It demonstrated a flexibility on the international stage that it did not possess domestically and that allowed it to change discourse and allies depending on the situation, although in reality its position was always the same. Thus, for example, on occasions it seemed to have (and indeed had) strategies that differed from those of the Soviet Union, although it never stopped being a satellite of that socialist superpower.

This flexibility allowed it to join with actors with which it shared very few ideological or strategic interests in the long-term. This can be observed, above all, in the so-called “Non-Alignment Movement” – then a very powerful (political and discursive) space – and especially in such international organizations as the United Nations.

Thus, Cuba formed alliances with, among others, the European democratic Left and above all those Social Democratic parties that governed most of the countries of the Old Continent at that time. It should be mentioned that not all of these relationships were equal. Worthy of mention are the links with the Nordic countries, which at that time sought to differentiate themselves from the “Russians and Yankees” and consolidate a sort of third way with a strong tilt to the left. Olaf Palme was an icon of that situation.

Furthermore, in the seventies, the impact of the Latin American left in Europe was very strong, even influencing domestic public opinion. In the framework of so-called “post-material values¹”, and between

¹ Inglehart, R. “The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies”, *American Political Science Review*, 65(4): 991-1017, 1971/1971

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the protests in opposition to the Vietnam War and those against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, important sectors of European political life also mobilized and voted with an eye to goings-on far from their own countries.

Among these goings-on were found the South African apartheid, solidarity with Central American revolutions, and struggles against Latin American dictatorships. In addition, there was a boom of Latin American music and literature in a decade filled with Latin American Nobel prize-winners (many of them enthusiastic public admirers of Fidel Castro).

Furthermore, the electoral offering to the left of European social democracy increased, threatening the leadership of traditional parties. Among others, the Euro communists, greens, liberals and diverse organized civil society groups can be mentioned; these organizations obliged European socialist leaders to radicalize their discourse with respect to issues outside national borders (and only outside of the borders). Examples included Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky, Willy Brandt, Felipe González and Françoise Mitterand, among the most well known.

Furthermore, in light of the disasters occasioned by the terrorist States that dominated Latin America, the death squads and civil wars, the situation in Cuba showed a certain stability that distanced it from the attention of transnational human rights organizations, which gave priority to their work in the Southern Cone.

But even for those socialists that criticized the Castro regime (as the Germans and English did, indeed, do), Cuba served their objectives, given that it permanently occupied US attention and opened a space for those groups that publicly used labels other than those of “Communist Party”.

This allowed other actors to more comfortably maneuver in a zone that, in the seventies and eighties, was very conflictual. Central America and the Caribbean began in the seventies to slide out of North American control. Not only because of the Sandinista revolution and the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, but also as a result of the electoral triumph of Social Democratic parties like the Dominican Revolutionary Party and the Jamaican People’s National Party, revolutions in Granada and Guyana, and the notable change in policy in Panama during the last years of Torrijos.

The Cuban government also maintained relationships with the great Latin American parties, not all necessarily of the left but that also occupied a large part of that space. For example, the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party, Democratic Action in Venezuela, the Dominican Revolutionary Party (especially its leader, José F. Peña Gómez) and the National Liberation Party in Costa Rica. These

Cuba demonstrated that it was and is efficient at finding powerful godfathers to sustain its finances despite constant deficit and to offer international protection. Indeed, after the fall of the USSR and a few years of foul winds, the appearance of Hugo Chávez gave air to an economy in free fall. This parasitic attitude to the prosperity of others also had the advantage of positioning the country in a strategic second plane, saving it certain geopolitical costs, which were paid by its protectors.

parties, and their leaders, maintained contradictory and ambiguous relations with the island, although these relationships began to quickly deteriorate in the early eighties.

In this sense, the ability of the regime was also seen in its maintenance of alliances that seemed opposed to its ideology, such as with the Argentine military during the Falklands (Malvinas) War (symbolized by the embrace between Argentina's then-Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Méndez and Fidel Castro) and also the excellent relationship it maintained with the ex-minister under Franco and leader of the People's Alliance and later the People's Party in Spain, Manuel Fraga Iribarne.

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2 – United States Policies

This is another of the explanations to understand certain strategies of the democratic (as well as the non-democratic) left. Many of these groups automatically positioned themselves (and continue to do so) in opposition to the US, regardless of the actual position the latter should adopt. At the same time, the US maintained a polarizing position with regards to Cuba, with absolutely no space for a possible conciliation or any flexibility. This obliged other actors to take sides, and in fact cost the US allies and gained friends for the Cuban regime. This began very early, in the seventies, during the frustrated invasion and the subsequent Cuban Missile Crisis.

For this reason, many analysts consider the US policy of total confrontation to be a mistake, including the embargo and its successive tightenings, above all the so-called Helms-Burton Act. This tough position contrasted with the flexibility with which the Cubans changed alliances and positions on the international stage.

Nevertheless, far from being an involuntary error, this was a trademark of US policy in its "back yard". It was seen in key moments in the region's history, such as the overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz (and, outside the immediate region, of Salvador Allende), the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, and the policies of Ronald Reagan in the eighties (an era known as the "second Cold War" because of the violence of the bipolar confrontation, with Central America and the Caribbean becoming one of its principle battlegrounds)².

The myth constructed around Che Guevara is also crucial. A hero constructed on the very negation of his behavior and actual decisions. A T-shirt that means nothing for the person who wears it, but upon which the permanency (and impunity) of the oldest non-democratic regime on the continent is sustained.

² This was accentuated when the US encouraged the intervention of the Christian Democrat International in the region, including the German Franz-Joseph Strauss, which further radicalized the position of the Germans who at that time led the Socialist International under Willy Brandt.

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US policy left no room for alliances with other actors in these matters. The message was clear and it was systematized in the so-called “Kissinger Report”: any activity in favor of governments or groups of the left affected the national security of the US and the North American response would be in line with this threat, as the Grenadians could well testify in 1983. This message was, at the same time, also directed to domestic public opinion, which was deeply affected by Cuban issues and by perceptions of the strength of American leadership in the world.

It should also be said that, when the US pursued other types of strategies (such as under the government of James E. Carter, a period known as *détente*), the expansionary activities of the Cubans not only continued but grew exponentially. Thus, their influence reached its maximum in Central America and the Caribbean at the beginning of the eighties, thereby legitimizing, in part, the electoral defeat of the Democrats and the arrival to the White House of the “hawks” of the Republican Party.

3- Narrative and networks

A discursive factor also exists, linked to the collective imagination of the left and ably exploited by the Castro regime. In a way, the Cuban revolution forged the radical left in Latin America, and this influenced numerous groups and leaders both during the Cold War, and afterwards. Many of them, today distanced from radical politics, maintain through the Cuban situation one of few political links with their youthful past.

There is an idealized, naive and yet also cynical view, which sustains a discourse where reality and narrative share no points of contact. Thus a discourse in favor of *castrismo* is sustained by a series of anachronistic elements, inexistent and counterfactual, and therefore difficult to refute (that, for example, should the Castros leave, Cuba would go back to how it was during the Batista dictatorship).

Latin American progressive politics loves revolutionary socialism, as long as it is far away (and, if possible, has Caribbean beaches). The so-called Cuban “*Nueva Trova*” (New Ballad), cinema, and literature reinforced this imaginary narrative with their romantic content, while the distance between reality and idealized revolution grew by the day.

In this, the myth constructed around Che Guevara is also crucial. A hero constructed on the very negation of his behavior and actual decisions. A T-shirt that means nothing for the person who wears it, but upon which the permanency (and impunity) of the oldest non-democratic regime on the continent is sustained.

In this sense, the new life possessed by the Latin American left the-

se last almost fifteen years has also renewed support for the Cuban revolution that, drawing on its flexibility (and because of economic scarcity), went from a Marxist discourse to a nationalist position kindred to the new center of economic power, now found in Caracas.

Here it is also necessary to speak of the role of Cuban exiles and their invaluable support for the consolidation of that collective imagination so damaging to the regime's opposition. For those who live far from the Caribbean and do not closely follow its domestic politics, the role of the Cuban exile community was key in the construction of a political opinion and an idea about the Cuban situation that, time and again, ended up favoring the Castro brothers' regime.

The radical discourse of the Cuban exiles (or, to be fair, of some groups and leaders) became an empirical confirmation of the idea that the departure of the Castros would produce a return to the Batista era. The strategies towards the island, certain nefarious characters and their alliances with the most extreme sectors of the Republican Party, alienated even further those who, with ideas of the democratic left, could support some kind of change in Cuba.

On the other hand, the seventies and eighties were years in which very solid exile networks were constructed. Chileans, Argentines, Paraguayans and Bolivians settled in European and some Latin American countries. There, they established solid political and personal relationships and many reconstructed their ideological frameworks, modifying and even renouncing the most radical traditions of the left. And there, the absence of Cubans was notorious, living as they were in vast numbers in Miami and not participating in this phenomenon even tangentially.

These Latin American exile networks redefined their positions but invariably (and because of the lack of political and also personal contact) understood the Cuban opposition as part of the same political line as that which had obliged them to flee their countries. Furthermore, to understand a little more the current situation, these same exiles today occupy the first and second ranks of Latin American governments.

The future

The previous pages were only some ideas to search for explanations for why important groups of the democratic left supported (and support) the Cuban government, turning a blind eye to the systematic human rights violations that occur within the island's territory.

I am a pessimist with respect to any change coming out of the current context. Cuesta Morúa demonstrates this when he describes the surprising role of Brazil. The new geopolitical landscape, in which the Europeans are losing power and specific weight, will also drag

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down the values they imposed (albeit nominally and with notable defections). The new world of the BRICS and their allies does not portend that the values they provide to the world be much different from those they sustain within their own countries. On the other hand, the countries that have managed to transcend their national borders with their demands for greater freedom have done so with the help of leadership and strong popular mobilizations, circumstances that do not appear to be present in Cuba.

Nevertheless, I also think that this should not mean the work should be abandoned, above all at the brink of a more than probable political transition that opens a window to a unique opportunity. Cuesta Morúa correctly indicates some possible paths in the international sphere, such as work within civil society. Nevertheless, it does not seem appropriate to abandon work with States and the political elite, especially in Latin America, where it is still these groups who form social discourses, articulate identities and disseminate ideology among the rest of society.

Approaching the end of a cycle in many of the region's countries, a large number of the intellectuals, artists, political leaders and activists linked to the left – in diverse ways – will be prepared to listen to other versions about Cuban and its future³. It is important that during this process the errors of the past are not repeated.

³ The publication of Claudia Hilb's book may be an example of this: "Silencio, Cuba. La izquierda democrática frente al régimen de la Revolución Cubana, Buenos Aires, Ed edhasa, 2010".

Brief points on the egalitarian dream

By **Rubén Chababo**

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1. Around the beginning of the seventies Mario Vargas Llosa wrote one of the most enthusiastic and dazzling accounts of the Cuban revolution. The author of 'The Time of the Hero' answered in those years, along with so many other Latin American writers and intellectuals, the call to accompany the truly miraculous deed that was the end of a dictatorship and the promise of the "fulfillment of the Gospel on Earth" as Lezama Lima once described the revolutionary process.

Reading these accounts fifty years later, one cannot help but feel frustration and uneasiness because little or nothing, almost nothing, is left of the joy and hope confirmed in the accounts and constructed with the efforts and dreams of so many.

When Vargas Llosa wrote those texts (almost contemporaneously with the Satrean writings on the Revolution known as "Hurricane over Sugar") nothing indicated that the outburst of just rebellion against the imperial order would shortly become a lurching bureaucratic structure, disposed to fulfill the dreams and ideals of a handful of officials and abandoning millions of men and women to their luck and to the most feared hell.

Because the most feared hell, for any human group, for any society, is nothing other than totalitarianism, that exercise of power through the use of fear and daily control, coopting public and private life, pulverizing all possibility of design by converting into "public enemy" all who dare to express an opinion that does not coincide with the official word of the State. In those early seventies, when the Revolution dawned with all of its promise, nothing suggested that tragic detour.

2. Despite the passing of years I have never been able to forget that afternoon in Santa Clara, towards the end of the eighties – I was a student trying, in the torrid heat of the tropics, to write a humble thesis on literary vanguards – when a "spontaneous" group of neighbors gathered in the surroundings of Plaza Central. They carried bags full of rubbish and eggs that they began to hurl against the tightly shut door and windows of a humble house. The owners of that house had left for exile in Miami a few days before and had left behind an older sister who had not decided to leave. The joy of

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that group of demonstrators shouting condemnation at the old Villa Clara residents echoed along with the loudspeakers of an old pickup truck from which a group of youngsters cursed, to the worst of all worlds, the traitors to the revolutionary faith.

Some days later, somebody mentioned that a raft, one more among thousands of rafts, with two families from Camaguey, had managed to cross Cuba's territorial waters but some few kilometers from the North American coast had sunk with all its crew, a situation that could be described as "common" in a country where the only escape route was those improvised vessels thrown into a shark-infested sea. "Common situations", just like those humiliating *escraches* – demonstrations – repeated from the north to the south of the island in front of the old residences of exiled Cubans, who fail to inspire even minimal solidarity from anyone on or off the island.

3. For the left, and especially the Latin American left, none of these abuses ever shadowed its agenda, not even as a theme to denounce in an international forum. While *escraches* (repudiation meetings) and sinkings of precarious vessels weighed down with exiles happened on and off the island, Latin American writers continued their pilgrimages to Havana supporting with their presence a political and social situation they would never have accepted for their own lives. From Eduardo Galeano and Mario Benedetti to Gabriel García Márquez, the authoritarian order was saluted and blessed with the consent of illustrious progressives, depicted in the pages of the magazine *Casa de las Américas* and reproduced to excess in the pages of the newspaper *Granma*. The Revolution never, to those intellectuals, deserved even the most minimal critical observation; on the contrary, they maintained a double standard that always spared from condemnation those governments and states where, according to them, "real socialism" was being constructed. That which in their countries of origin would have attracted immediate concern or rejection, in the Cuban case was – and is – read as error or digression, never as intentional or essential actions to sustain an authoritarian regime. The situation differs little from that of Europe in the fifties and sixties when a wide spectrum of writers sympathetic to communism refused to associate the Soviet Union with what it really was, a criminal regime sustained on the basis of a police state and concentration camps.

Not even the Padilla affair, which culminated in a tribunal in front of which the author of 'Out of the Game' incriminated himself for actions he never committed, managed to significantly move the needle of the scale. Neither did the public denouncement of the existence of Military Units to Aids Production, an euphemism for re-education camps where thousands of homosexuals were impri-

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soned, manage to inspire any solidarity towards those victims. It is true: Susan Sontag, Juan Goytisolo, Octavio Paz, Italo Calvino, Jorge Semprún and Juan Rulfo were some of those who decided to break with the general indifference, but what prevailed in general terms, and especially in the Latin American camp, was indifference and tolerance of injustice in the name of preserving “superior ideals”.

4. At this point in the 21st century, after so many reports from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and so many other organization that in the past denounced the violence carried out by Latin American authoritarian regimes, it should not be necessary to keep trying to convince people that what has been happening in Cuba for decades is a dictatorship. Nevertheless, this truism is unheard of and fails to penetrate the skin of an intellectual camp and a progressive camp that, despite the evidence, refuses to recognize what is in front of its eyes. And it is obvious that this would imply accepting not that the revolutionary dream is wicked, nor that egalitarian ideas or the dream of a society outside imperial powers are wicked, but rather that what we call wicked arises in the moment in which those noble principles are appropriated by a bureaucracy that values itself as the only interpreter of those emancipatory legacies, imposing its will on the masses without once seeking their consent.

No idea that calls for independence from capitalist cruelty, as we know it with all its devastating consequences in the 20th and recently commenced 21st centuries, should be of concern. But what should be condemnable and repudiable – and those countries of so-called real socialism have demonstrated this, from Bulgaria to the Soviet Union and from Romania to Cuba – is to impose an economic, social and political system beneath the arbitrary will of a repressive police apparatus. To pretend, moreover, that this arbitrary state should be recognized as a superior model and, even worse, as the realization of a utopian and profoundly *human* ideal. Because even if the egalitarian dream were achieved – if bread and health, as the authoritarian leadership declares, could be guaranteed albeit poorly to each and every citizen – that humble or grand wellbeing would never cease to be a hell if it were constructed on a base of fear and repression.

This is a dilemma that that progressive political thought has never been able to resolve and that a good part of the Latin American intellectual community has preferred to ignore while gazing, self-satisfied, in the other direction.

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Manuel Cuesta Morúa's Appeal

For many years I have been asking my postgraduate students – young people already on their path in life – if in their opinion “revolution” is something good or bad. The ambiguity and imprecision are deliberate. Throughout the decades the response has varied, from “marvelous” to “terrible”. But the response that most adequately reflects the ideas and sentiments inspired by the question was: “I like it, when it’s somewhere else”. I think that expresses, in a concise and credible manner, the distance we create between a daily life regulated by a combination of values and expectations, and that corner of dreams and ideals in which revolution coexists, perhaps, with the first girlfriend.

Manuel Cuesta Morúa's⁴ just and vigorous appeal to democratic and reformist intellectuals reminded me of that response. Revolution has been the most powerful utopia of the 20th century. Revolutionary passion connects France in 1789, Russia in 1917, China in 1949 and Cuba in 1959: moments of embodiment of the ideal, of acceleration of history, and of a forceful advance towards its happy ending. Revolutions break the regular rhythm of things, impose the will of man over mediocrity and necessity, and construct the new man. It requires great force of reason to deny the call of that dream.

Nevertheless, a distinction must be drawn between two different things: the revolution and the regime that is born of it, and that must continue to call itself revolutionary in order to legitimize itself in the former. For revolution is an eternal myth, but its constructions enter into the human plane. Those who live it quickly perceive the difference between the utopia and its realization. The first and hardest reality is the moral and political validation of assassination, since for the revolution, in arms or in government, it is legitimate and necessary to terminate enemies, those who remain neutral, or those who are not sufficiently enthusiastic.

For those who look at it from afar, it is easier to maintain solidarity with the ideal and ignore the questionable aspects of its practices. Hope is an enormously efficient veil. F. Furet made his analysis of communist or simply anti-fascist intellectuals in the thirties and forties, who maintained their solidarity with the “lighthouse of socialism” and at the same time defended Western democracy; that

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⁴ Cuesta Morúa, Manuel: “Cuba and the Latin American democracies”, Latino-Cuban Dialogue Volume 1 Number 2: http://puentedemocratico.org/dlc/Dialogo_Latino_Cubano_2.pdf

condemned Hitler's atrocities but ignored those of Stalin.

Since 1959 the Cuban revolution renewed the revolutionary myth and brought it closer to Latin Americans, with a substantial addition: the denouncement of Yankee imperialism, soon corroborated by the Bay of Pigs. In the sixties, there were many more products of revolutionary utopia, strengthening the Cuban example. Cuba was supported by an important movement of world opinion, backed up by prominent intellectuals and politicians, and on the other hand was accompanied in Latin America by armed political movements, which found in Cuba the key for their action.

Like the Soviet Union before it, Cuba was utopia and state at the same time. Early on, the institutionalization of the revolution and the consolidation of a regime based on the Soviet model sowed doubts amongst the democratic and reformist left. In Argentina, an experience such as the election of Alfredo Palacios in 1961, who mobilized the entire democratic and progressive spectrum in Cuba's name, was already unimaginable two years later, although it was also unimaginable that a condemnation of Cuba would emerge from those parts. The hour of the revolutionaries, dependent on the military, financial and political support of Cuba, had already begun. The myth and the regime could continue together in the progressive imagination, because in the opposing camp two strong models coincided: the United States and the military dictatorships. Not even various examples of Cuban realpolitik managed to affect that perception.

Modern history is begun with the turn, relatively recent, toward democracy and human rights. In the seventies both ideas were considered liberal relics. The same occurred with the commandment "thou shalt not kill", violated by priests and the faithful in the name of Christ Resurrected. The new generalized support for human rights – which had in Argentina one of its most important expressions – led to a general condemnation of violence. The revolutionary myth and its regimes were measured by a different standard.

Had, then, the hour arrived to look at Cuba according to human rights parameters? With certain exceptions, this did not happen. Maybe because Cuba is far away and very closed. Maybe because the capacity for self-deception that Furet found in French intellectuals is not the exception, and whoever decides to do so can avoid finding out too much about what happens on the island. This is common among those who in their youth fell in love with the Cuban revolution, and want to save that small private altar. Like agnostics who do not want to break with their parents' religion, they fulfill the minimum obligations: admire revolutions in other countries, the further away the better; celebrate massively the visit of Fidel

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Castro, the now sickly constructor and defender of the repressive regime. Democratic and progressive intellectuals do not glorify the Cuban regime but they excuse it, much as the Jacobin guillotine was excused by the “aristocratic conspiracy”: the North American embargo, the difficulties of constructing socialism, the threat of worse alternatives...

They do not defend it, but nor do they criticize it in public. They remove it from debate. In Buenos Aires, even before chavismo and kirchnerismo resuscitated the ideals of the seventies, few people wanted to publically debate the question. It was as dangerous and ominous as discussing one’s parents’ intimacies. It was not about caring for the fundamentals of one’s present beliefs, but rather something more ineffable: one’s own history, one’s identity, the necessity of showing oneself and showing that, above all, that young idealist was still alive.

I think that, to a greater or lesser extent, Manuel Cuesta Morúa’s appeal is relevant for many of us, for our action or omission. Few have done the difficult emotional and intellectual work of taking a step back from the juvenile ideal and observing the Cuban regime as it is, by the light of the values we claim to support today: a dictatorship, and one of the hardest. It is time to do so, for the Cubans and for ourselves.

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