

[Speech delivered by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the closing session of the Federation of Latin American Journalists \(FELAP\) 8th Congress, held at the Main Hall of the University of Havana on November 12, 1999 \[1\]](#)

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A message from Comrade Fidel

Dear Granma readers:

As a way of settling a debt with the members of the Journalists Union of Cuba and the Federation of Latin American Journalists, I am sending Granma this speech delivered in an intimate, almost confidential climate in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana on November 12, 1999, after carefully revising some of the more delicate passages. I take full responsibility for everything expressed in it.

Fidel Castro

Dear friends:

Today will be different from other occasions. I have tried to find out what has been going on these past days, but you yourselves have not provided me with any information. I had arrived in time, perhaps half a minute early and in more of a rush than usual, so I had hoped that Tubal (chairman of the Journalists Union of Cuba, UPEC) might tell me about the work you have been doing and the agenda planned for this evening but nobody knew, I do not know if he even knew (LAUGHTER). I was told that this was the end of the Congress of the Federation of Latin American Journalists (FELAP) and the beginning of the meeting of Spanish and Latin American journalists. Well, it is beginning, yes, it has been announced. I think there are two people from Portugal and one from Spain.

I was trying to understand what this was all about, the two meetings, and I asked, "Is there going to be a speech?" And I was told, "No there will be no speech but a choir." And so nobody could give me any orientation or even a bit of information. All I had found out by 7:30 p.m. were a few details about what was going on here, and nothing more. I did know that the FELAP Congress was ending. I learned something through the press, and through the few minutes of television news I was able to see. I asked, "Where is the closing session?" They said, "In the Aula Magna of the University of Havana." I wondered why, and I asked myself, Could they have been evicted from the International Conference Center? (LAUGHTER) Yes, because sometimes there are evictions there, or is it because the Aula Magna has such great symbolic significance? I was glad to hear that it was for the latter reason. And I said to myself, I would like to be there, even if it is only for a few minutes, even if it is only to extend greetings. Was it just out of admiration and affection for this organization? No, it was not only for that reason. It was, in my opinion, because this organization is today more important than ever.

I know that some journalists have expressed certain doubts about the role, the possibilities and the prospects of this organization. But, I think that despite the fact that it is small and shy of resources, if all of you put your minds to it and all of us put our minds to it, if we all wanted it, this organization could be the instrument that we need now more than ever.

I had the privilege of participating, around seven months ago, in a Cuban journalists congress. Before that there had been a congress of our country's writers and artists, quite a few weeks earlier, you could say, and I can assure you that throughout the many years of the Revolution I had never had the opportunity to witness two meetings, or congresses, as fruitful as these, and both took place in the first half of the year. There was a great deal of discussion, genuine discussion about all kinds of subjects and issues.

I understand very well how difficult it is to be a journalist in a socialist country, let us say, in our own country where the media and the press are not the private property of anyone, but rather the property --I will not say of the state, because this definition would be imprecise, and the state is an increasingly maligned institution; we conceive of the media as the property of the people. It might seem like a cliché, a phrase, a slogan but perhaps what is most difficult is making the most efficient, optimal use of the media, which belong to the people and are closely associated with what is known as the state.

The ultimate dream of reactionary forces in this century, throughout the development of capitalism, has been to demonstrate that the state serves absolutely no purpose, although they know very well what purpose it serves.

According to the philosophy of these reactionary sectors, the state is inefficient, the state is a disaster, the state must be discredited, and I would even agree, depending on which state it was.

The state, responsible for playing a fundamental role in an era of historical transition, is an indispensable institution, absolutely indispensable. Actually, what we would like to do away with are the inefficiencies of a state that we revolutionaries have not been able to construct in a better way. The old state of the capitalists and exploiters is the state that we would like to see removed once and for all.

Therefore, there are two kinds of state and two different concepts of what the state is, which are diametrically opposed: that perverse state of theirs, so operational and this inefficient state of ours. In the end, when each has fulfilled its purpose, may they both disappear, as Marx dreamed.

One of the things about Marxism that I found most appealing was the idea that one day there would be no state, that once its mission was completed, this instrument that was needed to create a new society would have no reason to exist any longer.

Marxism is full of dreams, and I am not here to lecture you on Marxism or even to defend it. I am simply reflecting on a dream, not a utopia. There is a difference between dreams and utopias, while there are many similarities between them.

Martí once said that today's dreams are tomorrow's realities. We must always start out dreaming, we must always start out creating utopias, and I am speaking as someone who started out as a Utopian, and on his own account, which is the strangest thing about it. When I first became a Utopian, meditating on the problems of the society I lived in, I do not think I had even heard of Utopians. But the truth is that I started out as a dreamer, a Utopian, and today I believe I am a realist, a dreamer and a Utopian. Everything begins with faith, faith in Man. If you have faith in Man, then you have the conviction that dreams and utopias can be made a reality.

How far we seem to be from communism, and how far we really are! How far we are from the distribution formula that goes, "From each according to his work, to each according to his needs." How far we are from that beautiful formula! And how wise was Marx when he spoke of two stages: one socialist and the other communist, the first governed by the formula "From each according to his ability,

to each according to his work." It is a very simple, extremely simple formula. He was wise, because today this is practically the only formula that can be fought for, a necessary path that cannot be avoided and one that seemed an unjust formula to those of us who had fallen in love with the communist formula.

For me, the socialist formula is a necessarily unjust formula, but it is far better than the repugnant capitalist society where those who really do contribute according to their work receive almost nothing, while the laziest members of society get almost everything.

You are also proletarians; you are proletarians of intellectual work, proletarians of thought, proletarians in the creation of messages; you are proletarians when you rush out to bring a report to the newspaper, and before, when there were no computers you desperately tapped away at a typewriter. You are also wage earners.

Is there anyone here from the IAPA (Inter-American Press Association)? No, tell me the truth, is there anyone? I imagine that you, as journalists, live from your work, and that, although it may not be much, you are paid something for it, some more than others; therefore, you are wage earners. In accordance with the socialist formula, perhaps you would be paid according to your ability, and since not everyone has the same ability, those with the greatest ability would receive much more. Some may have much less ability, but many more children, many more needs, and, in the end, we could not entirely speak of a just society. Well, that is what would happen to you in a socialist society; in a capitalist society, we know very well what happens.

These reflections --I do not want to elaborate further on them-- could perhaps serve to explain my rejoicing at the congress held in the first half of this year where I was able to see more clearly than ever what a decisive role the press can play in socialism, how the press should function under socialism, and the immense, infinite possibilities of the press in socialism. Many years of Revolution have passed but it is like one of those things that you suddenly see so clearly.

Forty years of Revolution were necessary, experiences of all kinds were necessary, the special period was necessary, a colossal ideological battle was necessary, it was necessary to end up in this that is called a global world where, among other things, it is disinformation and lies that are most global.

Perhaps, there are no better circumstances to understand the value of the media when they are at the service of capitalism and imperialism. Imperialism and capitalism have largely subsisted thanks to subjective factors, and one gets the impression that the capitalists discovered this before the Marxists.

As for me, I also feel that subjective factors are of major importance, and history itself does not move in a straight line; there are advances, and setbacks, and then further advances that are always interspersed with greater or lesser setbacks.

I recently spoke at length about these matters with our journalists. The capitalists discovered the value of subjective factors, and discovered that the mass media were the perfect instrument to exercise an overpowering influence on these subjective factors that constitute indispensable ingredients of history, of historical progress, or of the continuation of systems that are wicked, exploitative, monstrous, inhuman, and that subsist until a crisis, which we could call nuclear, definitively destroy them.

And I say nuclear because it is only when such a huge quantity of problems build up in these countries and they become absolutely unsustainable that they finally explode cutting across these subjective factors and despite the overpowering control that a system may have over the media, which it uses to inhibit these subjective factors, which could contribute more to speeding up the course of history and the removal of a world full of injustice, full of misery, full of monstrosities.

What I mean to say is that progressive people, people who want to change the world, must understand the importance of these tools that are used to build awareness, and that can turn these subjective

factors into decisive instruments in the course of historical events.

At the meeting I was referring to, these truths were made evident. Of course, they were not discovered on that particular day. It was the result of the battle we have been waging, the product of many years of reading a growing number of news reports about all of the things happening in the world, in this highly globalized world where a cat dying in a corner of Cairo shows in a press dispatch. Those who are used to be informed, to spending two or three hours every day gathering information about what is going on in the world, have an idea about the functioning of the mechanism for spreading lies and planting disinformation.

I have had such opportunity, and I am recounting precisely what I have experienced more than ever in this era of crisis, of unipolar hegemony and the globalization of reactionary ideas and lies, which used to reach a country, and then reached a continent, and now reach every corner of the world, in fractions of a second.

In fact, the socialist bloc and the USSR were not destroyed fundamentally by their own errors; they were destroyed by this infernal machinery of lies, deception and disinformation. They were led to believe, and no one was unable to counteract it, the illusion that these consumer societies, this Western world, were the most wonderful things that could ever be imagined. Just think of those magazines, which use as much paper as would be needed to teach the current population of the world to read and write ten times over, and which are devoted, for example, to gossip about what this or that celebrity did, enough frivolity to send the current population of the world to hell a hundred times over. They were destroyed by all these things, all this propaganda, which those acting on behalf of the ideals of progress were unable to counteract.

I know that the immense majority believed in these ideals, but they were not able to discover or develop the means, ways and procedures for combating the ocean of lies and illusions spread by every possible means. They were not fools, the ones who devoted their energies to radio broadcasts like the Voice of America, and others by its allies, aimed at reaching every corner of the world and the heart of socialist societies with all of the illusions and all of the lies that alienated millions of people in these countries.

Of course, none of us Cubans deserves special credit for having discovered these things and for seeing them much more clearly. Some of these countries were enormous, and there were such things as narrow-mindedness and dogmatism there, to the extent that doctrine was practically turned into a religion and bureaucracy and a great many other things allowed for, or made possible, a setback in history. They should have been perfected, and needed a great deal of perfecting but were instead destroyed. The basic element continued to be that instrument so skillfully and efficiently used by capitalism and imperialism.

I already mentioned that immense amounts of resources were invested in this. I talked about the frivolities, gossip and foolishness that poisoned the people's minds in the same way that some of these extremely frivolous soap operas can tantalize, conquer and hold captive the minds of millions of people. This is the way they have manipulated, and continue to manipulate today more than ever, the minds of billions of people.

Take, for example, the enormous amount of paper, of the highest quality, used simply for advertising, and the millions of hours invested every year in advertising. We ourselves have not had advertising on radio or television or in publications for quite a while, but in recent times we found ourselves obliged, in order to broadcast a major sports event, for example, to put some advertising on television. Suddenly, in the midst of an emotional, tense game, our television broadcasts and our people, especially those who are interested in these things, had to deal with an abrupt interruption to advertise some sort of merchandise, perhaps this or that make of car, or some other thing that the immense majority of the population does not have the slightest possibility of acquiring.

Finally, as a result of the recent Pan American Games in Winnipeg, where the banditry and corruption in

sports, as in so many other things, became more evident than ever, we decided --even if we had to cut off a hand, or as they say, even if it cost us an arm and a leg-- to put an end to commercial advertising during sports competitions.

Sometimes we have been interviewed by foreign television networks, and I have had the opportunity to see the broadcasts. It is really exasperating, and is only tolerated out of habit, when what someone is saying is interrupted every three minutes to advertise who knows what, some sort of ointment, some oil or cream to make your skin look more or less suntanned, or softer, whatever, some kind of cosmetics, or some gadget to do exercises at home, all kinds of crazy things, and I at least find it extremely exasperating, it is really awful.

I would say that today, people in the United States would not be able to live without these interruptions, because they have practically become a conditioned reflex, and if a show is not interrupted for a commercial, they would find it lacking in suspense or interest, because they need to experience the anguish of waiting to see what happened next, or what else the guy talking had to say.

Just imagine how we, who have a little newspaper with only eight pages and have had just one daily newspaper for years now, feel to see a newspaper from some of our Third World countries with 80 pages of advertising. These countries where there is so much hunger and poverty and so many children on the streets who do not attend school, who go by begging and washing windshields. Think of all the paper used, the printing presses, all of the other things. And I am only talking about the press.

You want to find a piece of news and you have to go through three pages full of advertisements of the craziest things in the world to find something you are mildly interested in. When you do find it, there is a caption reading, "continued on page so-and-so" and you have to go over 40 other pages to follow up what has interested you.

So, taking into account the enormous poverty in many of these countries, perhaps the only benefit would be receiving every day, together with their colossal venom, a huge amount of toilet paper.

We have to resign ourselves; even you journalists, if you write something good in the few spaces open for you to write, you still have to resign yourselves to the same fate as those large quantities of advertisements. (Laughter.)

Look, it would be better if I do not get carried away with this topic, or with these topics. I only wanted to mention some ideas on the importance of the press or, better still, the importance of journalists, or of those that nowadays we call communicators. I think they now have a Social Communications Faculty in our university. That is perfect. It is an excellent name. We still have to understand this fully but I must admit it is more encompassing.

That was something we saw very clearly in that congress I was trying to give you some idea about, when considering the possibilities open to us, the communicators in poor countries. I would never dare consider myself a journalist, but I do have the need to communicate; I am not a communicator, but someone who needs to communicate. But, I mean, our possibility vis-a-vis that colossal empire and the endless power of those trying to force the world back and are threatening it with extermination. We must destroy their ideas, concepts and lies.

I truly believe that in the present moment, at the threshold of the new millenium, of which a great lie is being said, a lie that almost drives one crazy. It is said, for example, that the next millenium begins in the year 2000. This is yet another lie, although we can admit it is nothing but a conventional lie. If they want to, we can celebrate two beginnings of the century and two beginnings of the millenium at the same time, and not toasting with champagne, but denouncing things that must be denounced. On December 31 this year and December 31 the next year, at 12 00 hours and a second, according to the geographic position of each country, because everything is so relative that in 12 hours there will be an infinite number of new years, new centuries and new millenia. Each citizen in the world will celebrate it

at a different moment, because when the exact moment has arrived for the neighbor across the street, it has not arrived for someone else. Mathematically this is the case. I bring this up just as an example of their ignorance, lies or conventionality, although in this case it is rather laughable.

The truth is that communicators may save the world. At least in this country, communicators are engaged in the task of saving a small nation fighting against the most powerful empire ever, the mightiest power in every field, whether economic, military, or technological, with the added inconvenience of being not only our closest neighbor but also our most stubborn enemy. Apparently, fate has wanted to give us that "privilege".

We are involved in that struggle. This is the only country in the world against which that nation wages a direct economic war. It plunders the others, it robs them, it is rapidly taking them over, at a good pace we can say, with some papers they print treasury bonds and U.S. dollars. It is the country in the world whose citizens save the least, less than zero right now, and spend more than their average individual income. They are the ones who spend the most and buy the most in the world.

At the emergence of capitalism, it was assumed that the financial monetary resources required would come from the savings that the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, would make, because poor people have usually been unable to save. Resources would come from the savings of the capital invested at home or abroad. Today, capital flows from the printing presses of the U.S. reserve system; I think there is where they are.

Take a look at this planet, at the world economic order and see why, when those things happen, there will unavoidably be not nuclear wars, but nuclear social explosions, the crisis that will put an end to all this. Let no one doubt it: this is unsustainable, regardless of how you analyze it or look at it.

When I talked about the significant role of communicators, about their role here, fighting against those people, I was not trying to praise you, but rather to express a deep conviction. We have the immense honor, an honor for Cuba --in a world full of such great political cowardice, in a world where there are so many weak politicians, or so many politicians who are so weak, to be more accurate-- of being the only country not only blockaded, of course, everyone knows that, but also of being the only country to which that powerful empire, in its desperation to reach the impossible objective of making us surrender, bans the sale of food and medicine.

See how low that system has fallen, see its decadence.

You mentioned today the United Nations voting. See the level of discredit, in spite of the huge propaganda machinery daily harping against this small country. Dante would not have been capable of painting a country such as the Cuba painted by these media, by this hideous imperialist machinery, with these lies about our small and --allow me to say it, even when blushing-- heroic country, not because of its own merits, but because of the circumstance of having such a mighty power as its neighbor and opponent. If our enemy were a small, powerless adversary, there would be no talk about Cuba in the world.

They have used all these means and, in spite of it, unbelievable things like what took place in the last voting have happened. Someone was late and went to the podium to explain that he had not cast his vote, but his position was this and this, in favor of the Cuban resolution. Another had pressed the button, but his name did not show on the board among those who voted, and he said: "Listen, I am here to say that I pressed the button and that we support the Cuban resolution." A thing like this had never happened before; and there was a representative from the United States denying the existence of the blockade on food and medicines.

I have had real fun these days, because I have seen them embarrassed, confused, tangled up and bewildered, whatever you want, in a way that makes them hysterical. What was all their media worth? What was the use of portraying Cuba as pure hell and making who knows how many people believe it? I

can bear witness to this. I receive many people visiting Cuba. When they see this is not the hell they expected, they start criticizing us, as if we were to blame for the fact that the rest of the world does not know about all the things that happen in Cuba, all the things the Cuban Revolution has done, and they almost call us morons for not having made this known.

For example, how many million people in the world would have to be explained that those 157 votes against two were actually 155 plus two that stated their position right there and the reasons why they had not voted. There was a third country that declared the same thing the following day. Its ambassador had not been there, and he asked the organization to record in the minutes that he was absent that day, but wanted to express his support. That makes 158. There were also six countries that had always supported the Cuban resolution but because of the enormous poverty many Third World countries are suffering they were in default, since they had been unable to pay their fees.

Why this support despite all the slander? What happened this year with the notorious Geneva Resolution comes to my mind: the day before the voting at midnight we had 25 votes for us, 6 more than the empire, that is, votes against the United States resolution. By 8:00 a.m. the following morning, just a few hours later, we had one vote less than they did: 20 votes for them and 19 for us. The top leaders of that country –the distinguished Secretary of State, the very distinguished Vice President of that country, and even the very illustrious President of the United States– had been desperately working the phone. I will not mention the circumstances, I will not mention any of those countries, because they really wanted to vote for us.

An abstention that became a vote against and 5 countries that were for us but were asked, urged, practically forced, to abstain caused the result against us. This happened in seven to eight hours, because when they saw they were losing, they did not sleep that night. They cannot imagine the humiliation it is for a leader to be forced to act against his wishes, or even his commitments.

That took place in Geneva, where they were going to get a real thrashing, but the number of participants was smaller, much smaller than in the General Assembly. They have a group of allies there that are unconditionally with them on these issues, mainly because of the slander.

You were speaking about the thousands of journalists murdered in these last few years in Latin America and other places and I racked my brains trying to find the name of a Cuban journalist murdered in these 40 years of Revolution. I racked my brains trying to make sure that I had not become amnesic, looking for the name of a Cuban journalist tortured by the Revolution, the name of a Cuban journalist beaten by the Revolution.

There have been some who have dishonored that noble profession and acted not like journalists, but like servants of that mighty empire, like mercenaries, betraying their small country, even though it had given them the opportunity to study a university career such as journalism thanks to the Revolution.

No matter what our mistakes may have been, no one has the right to betray their country, no one has the right to sell out and work like a mercenary for the enemy not only of our people, but the enemy of humankind. They betray their country and betray all humankind!

But not even for being traitors has anyone beaten them, physically eliminated them or committed an act of cruelty against them. If any of these mercenaries gets sick, he goes to a hospital sooner than a minister or a health official in this country. Some traitors have been tried and sentenced when they have committed serious crimes, when they have damaged the country, but not with death, not with beatings or torture, and they enjoy the same rights and benefits of all other citizens.

There are those who left the country and today make a living by contributing to the lies and slander of the empire. Even worse, there are some that have never written a page nor read a text on journalism and yet call themselves journalists. It is the empire that grants their certificates. They mix all sorts of people and call them independent journalists. Independent no less! They are the very embodiment of

dependency and mercenary attitudes.

To call them so is as big an offense to such an honorable profession as giving Jose Marti's name to a U.S. radio station operating from Miami, with an antenna set on a balloon many meters high and whose power, in their anger and desperation, they now want to double from 50 000 watts to 100 000. This is because the talented and brilliant owners of the most impressive technology have not been able to have their television station seen, nor their radio stations heard, except for a few broadcastings at some given times, because our very modest technicians always come up with something to silence them. They broadcast thousands of hours a day, thousands of hours of lies!

Is that democracy, is that freedom of the press? No, it is the press and the mass media at the service of the most grotesquely lying individuals, professionals in lies, slander and betrayal.

They spread their main propaganda from there but they also do it from here. More than a thousand foreign journalists are here right now for the summit. It is similar to what happened when the Pope came and thousands of journalists came to the country. Many of them were honest journalists coming from different places, but many were also sent to witness the fall of the walls of Jericho at the sound of the supposed trumpets. They believed the visit of the Holy Father in our country would mean the fall of the Revolution in a few hours. First, they deceived themselves by ignoring the ideological, political and intellectual strength of our people –a mistake they have made very many times-- and, second, they were mistaken about the Pope.

I read a cable recently –and this is something I have not said, but I am going to tell you– one of those cables I have to read every day. This one announced a new biography of Pope John Paul II, I do not know by whom, an American author, and it was an official biography. It was to come out in a few days, a 900-page volume. According to the cable, the author interviewed John Paul II ten times over the last few years, since he considered him a unique personality, which he is undoubtedly, I have said it myself several times. Now again, according to the cable, my only source of information so far, what is the image they intend to offer of him in this biography? That of a sort of lion tamer, something very far from the kindly image we have of this Pope.

The Pope was in this very Aula Magna giving a lecture. There, from that seat (he points at one of the seats where the audience is sitting) I listened to the Pope's lecture. According to the program, I did not have to attend, but I wanted to come and listen to him. He is very far from being the person the cable would make you believe –a lion taming Pope.

Even when it is a biography that evidently took years to conceive and write, what is the first thing the cable says about the book? That it devotes a chapter to Cuba. Oh, nothing good. It says that the book reveals the private matters, the details of what it calls the hardest test to the Pope's strategy in the second decade of his mandate –this is what it calls it, strategy, a military term– his trip to Cuba. It immediately describes the words and heroic deeds of the Vatican spokesman, Navarro Valls, one of the Pope's envoys in the months prior to the visit. He is a person I know. I have had the honor of meeting him. I have spoken with him even about matters that may be considered philosophical, although I spoke of these topics especially with an excellent priest and theologian who was sitting next to me (Monsignor Marini, the Pope's assistant and today bishop), who made a good impression with his discreet behavior and deep and even-tempered reasoning. This happened after dinner when conversation went on for hours. Navarro was sitting in front of me and the priest was sitting next to me. I had raised a theological question on the position of the Catholic Church about the possibility of intelligent life on other planets. So, I know Navarro Valls well. I know what he talks about, what he thinks and what he says. I have spoken with him more than once. He was always respectful and cautious.

It is very regrettable and I hope they are no more than slanted, inaccurate and grossly false interpretations that the author of the biography makes of his words, as reported in the cable.

It is obvious that the person who wrote this cable, a reporter from the Notimex agency in Rome, got a

scoop maybe they even gave him the complete text; it is also possible that he spiced up the draft he was given.

The first issue that the cable emphasizes is that the Pope's visit to Cuba was imposed on Castro. Actually, it was very sad for me to learn that day that, for the first time in my life, something had been imposed on me, that for the first time in the history of this Revolution, something had been imposed on our people, our government, our Party, our homeland. It was really disgusting, that phrase.

Of course, there were other issues. The cable discusses a letter, real or false, which, according to the author of the book, the Pope sent to Brezhnev to prevent the invasion of Poland. I do not know anything about that matter, nor whether the Pope sent a letter to Brezhnev; if that is the case, there will certainly be copies of it in the archives of the CIA and the U.S. Secret Service, because it is well known that, when Russia became "democratic", its archives fell into the hands of U.S. intelligence, and so they would know, better than anyone else, the contents of that letter. I do not know it, I do not know its contents; the cable only contains a few sentences between quotation marks. The complete version must be in the book.

This matter also supports the theory of the Pope as a lion tamer: the Pope, with his letter, prevented the invasion of Poland.

I knew Brezhnev well and other Soviet leaders of his era, too. Also their methods, styles, edicts, errors. But they were extremely cautious since they were particularly interested in avoiding certain risks in their relations with the West. When Cuba decided to send troops to Angola, to challenge the South African racists' invasion, there were more than a few contradictions with them and signs of fear.

In my opinion, the Soviets could not invade Poland; I could list many reasons, the most important of which is the high risk that such a foolish action, right in the heart of Europe, could have led to a nuclear world war.

Anyone who is familiar with history and has an ounce of common sense, can imagine heavy pressures and even strong words from the USSR; but that country, already embarked on the Afghanistan adventure was not in a political situation to simultaneously launch troops against Poland, a courageous people with fighting traditions and tens of millions of inhabitants. That, in addition to the important and decisive political factor, would have overloaded and created chaos within the soviet military mechanism, amidst great world tension.

It is commendable that the Pope would write a letter; it is commendable that he would argue and reason against the remote possibility. But the clumsy eagerness to present him as a lion tamer undoubtedly leads to an overstatement in claiming that with his letter he prevented the invasion of Poland.

The Pope's great influence over political events in the country where he was born is unquestionable, as it is that the Pope's views hold great sway. It could be a major subjective factor, which added to the true and objective reasons for which Poland could not be the target of a Soviet invasion.

Even worse: according to the much talked-about cable, the book recounts a message from the Pope to Bush, trying to persuade him against starting a war with Iraq, to which Bush replied that it was impossible; and several hours before the combat began -so goes the text of the cable- the Pope called President George Bush, and "even though he once more declared his opposition to the use of force, he offered his support."

Thus, the Pope is portrayed supporting that war. Actually, I cannot conceive of this Pope supporting a war. Anyone who knows him, anyone who has listened to him, and who knows that he is very cultured, holds deep convictions, has a knowledge of almost every language, of all philosophies, and all religions, cannot imagine the Pope taking such a stand.

I believe that if the Pope were unable convince someone that it is better not to embark on a vicious and destructive war, his reaction would be: I am very sorry, it is sad, it is painful, thousands are going to die, tens of thousands of people; hundreds of thousands of children are going to die in this country, from starvation, from lack of medicine - as has happened. It is impossible to accept the idea that the Pope would give his best wishes for victory to the head of an empire which years ago killed more than 4 million human beings in Viet Nam, left an unknown number physically disabled, poisoned land and forests for tens of years and caused, with its brutal and unjust aggression, tens of thousands of Vietnamese of all ages to suffer psychiatric trauma from which they will never recuperate as long as they live.

You do not need to be a member of his church, you do not need to be a believer to be absolutely convinced that this is impossible, that it is untrue.

How can anyone pretend to write an authorized biography of the Pope, depicting him in such shades of character? Is this really going to help the Catholic church which, just like other churches, wishes to promote its doctrine, its religion and to expand it worldwide?

And as far as the chapter about our country is concerned, how could anyone be so infamous as to reciprocate all the attention, the consideration, the courtesy and the gestures that we extended to the Pope --sincere, hospitable, respectful and friendly gestures-- with such crude lies?

I spoke for hours on the television, clarifying historic events and dispelling prejudices, with the aim of persuading Party members and young people, our heroic nation's fighting revolutionary masses made up of millions of people that, despite the philosophical and political differences, we had to set an example by taking part without posters and slogans, and with utmost respect, in the events involving our illustrious visitor.

We practically gave our country over to the Pope. There was not a single man with a gun or a revolver in the streets. There was not even a traffic accident caused by the mobilizations. It was --according to what many people in the Vatican later said-- the best-organized visit that the Pope had made. One hundred and ten foreign television channels, thousands of journalists, just to broadcast his visit! All the necessary means and transport, which was practically everything available in the country, facilities and squares chosen by the Pope's representatives were placed at his disposal, without a single exception.

They inspected in detail the chambers and rooms of the Council of State which were of interest to them. They requested the use of the Aula Magna of the University of Havana; Antonio Maceo Square, in Santiago de Cuba; Ignacio Agramonte Square in Camagüey, and finally, Revolution Square, in the capital of the Republic. They were given them all. For the mass in Santa Clara they were offered Ernesto Che Guevara Square, which they turned down. A square had to be hurriedly set up on the playing fields of the Villa Clara Faculty of Physical Education.

Cuban Television's main channel was placed at the service of the Pope to broadcast the masses, the homilies and the speeches made in every location. It was a perfect example of our traditional hospitality, decency, culture, the political courage of our people, and quite simply, an undeniable demonstration of our respect for the Pope as an eminent personality, head of a centuries-old religious institution, in the same way as we have known how to express our respect and recognition for all religions which are practiced in our country.

The official invitation to visit Cuba was personally delivered to the Pope on November 19, 1996, when I had an interview with him in the Vatican, where he received me with impeccable friendliness and respect.

Many of those measures adopted to guarantee the brilliance and success of the visit were not asked for by anybody --they were Cuba's initiative.

Is it fair, then, is it decent to present the Pope's visit to Cuba as something that was imposed on us?

The person who worked the most and best, among the Pope's envoys, was Father Tucci, a noble and devoted priest, who has organized the Pope's trips for the past 17 years, and with whom I had several meetings; he is not even mentioned in that cable.

Regardless the intentions of those who cooperated with the writing of this biography, whose author obviously had good access to the Vatican's archives, and held long and intimate conversations with Navarro Valls, whose words he transcribed, manipulated and interpreted in his own way, with an unquestionable hatred of Cuba, how could the Catholic Church benefit from such an unfair image as that which is portrayed, both of the Pope and Cuba?

It is known that the Pope wants to visit Viet Nam; if someone is later going to say that the Pope forced the Vietnamese into it, and that one of his emissaries imposed the visit on Viet Nam, the chance of the Vietnamese risking a visit from the Pope is going to diminish considerably.

It is known that the Pope would like to visit China. If the Chinese read a book of this sort, with the image of the Pope as a lion tamer, it is going to be very difficult for the Chinese to agree to the Pope's visit. It is completely absurd, and not in the slightest Christian, diplomatic or politic. I am entirely convinced that John Paul II will feel disturbed and embittered by this blatant manipulation of his trip to Cuba, where he received so much attention, such displays of respect, consideration and affection.

I have told you this story. It is further proof of how the media are used and of how myths about our homeland are invented, something which causes visitors to criticize us for not having been capable of letting the world know the truth, that this country is not Dante's inferno.

I was telling you of the satisfaction and inspiration left here by the congress of the Journalist's Union of Cuba. It was a congress that lasted several days longer than was planned. Every day it went on into the early hours of morning, and on the last day, if I am not mistaken, it was almost dawn when they finished. What time was it? (They say it was 8:30 in the morning). Four and a half days were spent discussing our problems, analyzing them in depth with a critical approach.

Of course, our difficult circumstances were made worse by our failure to make the best possible use of the media resources in our battle against imperialism. Because the fundamental aim of the Revolution has been to fight for social and human justice, and to fight against those people in the world who oppose that justice, which is the *raison d'être* of the Revolution.

Those days in the congress, we discussed the enormous possibilities offered by the media to a revolution and to a socialist revolutionary state. There, we were more acutely aware than ever before that the battle was not our battle, that we were the least important players, and that our country's struggle and the struggle of our communicators were turning into a battle for the world. Believe me, it was a great source of encouragement. We had such a clear perception then, and no issue was left out, we analyzed everything.

The fact that this course is holding its graduation today, is a result of that congress, because there they said: "What a shame that those courses attended Latin American journalists have been reduced to almost zero." The institution was in a precarious situation as far as resources and scholarships were concerned. Then a series of measures were produced for immediate implementation. You cannot imagine how much progress has been made in seven months!

It was there that the decision was made to create brigades of journalists, who would report on the work undertaken by our doctors in the most isolated corners of Central American and Caribbean countries. That is where the idea surfaced, which proved to be of enormous value, because it helped to maintain communication lines between our people and those doctors; between the doctors and their families, and the families with them; it served to uplift the spirit of those people who were doing heroic work in places

where they sometimes had to walk three or four days along a swampy path to reach a remote community where there was neither drinking water, nor electricity, and sometimes not even a radio. They set up a communication mechanism between the country and the most distinguished, the most heroic apostles of humanism in our nation today.

Yes, because our country has had many heroic teachers, like the 2,000 who went to the mountains of Nicaragua, where many thousands passed through over several years. I would not be able to tell you the exact number now, I do not remember precisely how long that program lasted, but it may well be that between 8,000 and 10,000 teachers passed through there, living in unimaginable conditions, where at times a couple, their large family, the horse and the teacher lived in a single room --they did not live in five-star hotels. They were days away, and even living in physical conditions that were sometimes a threat to their health, because all of them were used to better nutrition standards back in Cuba.

At that time we wanted to boost their food supply, to see how we could send them something to prevent them falling ill due to weakening immune systems. It was not possible, because when we sent them the first packages of food supplies, the first thing they did was to share out what we had sent them, whether it was chocolate, powdered milk, anything of that nature, among the children and the family - a very logical reaction. We remember with shame the stupidity of trying to boost their food supplies. It was an impossible task.

That is why, when I say heroes, apostles, I am not just talking about those doctors, I am referring to what is happening at this point in time. Nowadays we do not have teachers in such tasks abroad, nowadays we do not have soldiers confronting racist and fascist troops in South Africa, nowadays we are not involved in such activities; it is the role that our doctors are playing which is truly impressive, and what they are going to undertake in the near future will be five or six times greater than what they are doing at the moment.

Our country has created an enormous human potential, because paper was not used for gossip magazines, or for advertising; our resources were not invested in such things. Instead they were invested in training doctors, so that we became the country with the highest per capita index of doctors in the world; we invested in training teachers, so that we would have the highest per capita index of professors and teachers in the world; physical education and sports teachers were trained, who devote themselves to comprehensive education and training, not professional sport, so that we have achieved the highest per capita index of all the countries in the world; perhaps in the number of researchers and scientific personnel, and other fields, we are also among the top few.

That is how we have invested our very modest resources while enduring a blockade that has already lasted 40 years and which we were able to withstand even when it became more than just a U.S. blockade, that is, when the former Soviet Union joined that blockade. At the moment when it disintegrated and disappeared, trade was practically wiped out, until things began to improve slightly; but without a shadow of resemblance to what it used to be.

Almost ten years of double blockade have passed, without the closure of a single school, a single daycare center, nor a single polyclinic; not a single worker has been left without a guaranteed income; there has not been a single incident of this sort; our country managed to increase the number of doctors by approximately 30,000 during the years of the special period.

Thirty thousand new doctors graduated during the last decade, and such doctors, such training! This is because we had already been running the programs for years. Twenty-one university faculties, all the hospitals and health care centers turned into training centers. The value of all this is as yet unknown, all that accumulated experience, which can be offered to those countries in urgent need to train specialists. They can have a teacher each or a professor each, because just put a recently graduated doctor in the hands of any of those Cuban specialists who are fulfilling their mission abroad, and he or she will be a specialist in half the time it would take to train in a teaching hospital.

I have referred to this because these are issues relating to our country which are never, or at least very rarely, reported in the news around the world. However, if a mercenary working for the empire is arrested and sentenced to a few years in prison, a much lighter sentence than acts of treason receive in the United States, then it is news for a whole year, every day, in press releases and cables. And I am not blaming foreign journalists; in fact, we have recently had more contact with them as a result of certain events, and we have come across very able people and a high proportion of people that we can talk to and who appreciate the truth.

No, they cannot be held responsible, although we have had the misfortune of having received some who were solely on the payroll of the United States, and who worked in close collaboration with the United States Interest Section in Havana. There have been a few, not very many, not the majority, not even a small minority, but there have been cases which were particularly outrageous for the role they played in our country, promoting subversive activity, carrying out U.S orders, inciting mercenaries, creating false leaders and figures who were only known through cables and who could not even attract ten followers in this country.

That is what the empire was most interested in, that is, dividing, destabilizing, artificially creating figures and extolling them by unscrupulous means. I do not blame the journalists, because they too have to make a living, they need their salary. That was why I was asking if there was someone from IAPA here, because you know that cables are sent to headquarters and it is headquarters that decides what gets published. That is the freedom of the press enjoyed, as a rule, by many press intellectuals who have to work for big advertising and news agencies.

Well-known newspapers such as The New York Times, when the White House called to prevent the release of information they had on the imminent Bay of Pigs invasion, they did not print a single word; so they blew it, and the United States blew it with the humiliating defeat of that invasion.

Other things happen with the press in the capitalist world that are not ordered by the government. Some members of the press are open, all-out enemies of anything having to do with progress; some hold positions linked, above all, to national interests; and some simply indulge in self-censorship. So, some of them side with the worst interests and others side with the government, or the government's positions; while others, out of patriotic or falsely patriotic feelings, do not publish things which in their opinion could harm their country. What I mean is that if there is a humiliating defeat in the United Nations they do not publish it, the same as many other news stories; if there is hysteria against Cuba or certain images have been spread, they do not risk saying something positive about Cuba.

By considering us enemies of the U. S. government, practically by instinct, by habit, by tradition they do not publish certain news stories that are in complete contradiction with the blockade or in complete contradiction with the official policy of the empire. These are reasons why the truth is not known throughout the world.

It is not that they are told, "Listen, do not publish that." They simply abide by a certain line, a common practice. So where does the freedom of the press really stand? Where?

All right, I am not saying that there is absolutely no freedom of the press; every once in a while a journalist writes a few truths. There are journalists who study, do research and other efforts. There are very good American journalists, yes, but they publish only once; the second article is not published because there are pressures that come down from the White House to rather modest levels advising them not to touch on this or that in the name of allegedly national interests.

Even the most serious U.S. media are put under pressure to prevent publishing certain articles and materials, and in general, on the other hand, they echo stereotyped clichés about our country. There are never-failing, constant clichés to refer to Cuba, a single adjective. Even when they fight the monstrous blockade the argument is that it has failed, it has lasted 40 years and not achieved the goal of truly democratic changes, respect for human rights, a multi-party system, etc., etc., etc. There are no

ethical or human considerations.

Even when they recommend rectifying something they say –like Mr. Clinton does too– that they are trying to destroy the Cuban Revolution. They want to destroy –and I say this without chauvinism– the best and most humane social project of this century (Applause).

Which Third World country reduced illiteracy to zero and how long did it take? Which Third World country reached an average ninth-grade educational level in such a short period of time? Which country in the world has a population with the knowledge and political culture of our people, where every youth knows where China, Vietnam or any distant Pacific country are, while the immense majority of U.S. politicians do not know?

What other country knows of universal history, for instance, and the basic problems anywhere in the world? What happened in Vietnam, what happened in the Sahara, what happened in South Africa? What happened in any Latin American country: in Argentina, in Uruguay, in Chile? What happened in Central America? What happened in the dirty wars? Who armed and trained the biggest torturers and criminals in the world? Who is to blame for that Bay-of-Pigs-type invasion of a sister Central American nation that left 150,000 dead, including about 100,000 missing people?

They are the "apostles" of democracy, justice, human rights: those who came to an agreement with fascist governments at the end of World War II and took Nazi weapon experts back to the United States, where they had the means for manufacturing the most perfect bombs, missiles and all the sophisticated weapons with which they dominate or try to dominate the world today.

What country has taken the largest number of brains? Suffice it to say that over several decades this continent graduated 1.5 million doctors, 750,000 of whom are now abroad, almost all of them in the United States.

In the last 40 years, industrial nations have taken away from Latin American a huge number of professionals –I do not recall the exact figure. I only know that, according to a study the cost of training these professionals was not less than 30 billion dollars and they took them away without paying a dime.

Graduates from U.S. universities do not go to Haiti, Central America or South America to help develop these countries with their know-how.

Through the brain drain they have robbed many of the finest minds in this hemisphere. And today everybody admits that brains, know-how, and information are key factors for development. They have taken many of the best, and they have not paid a dime. You should not believe that they only rob us through high interest rates, public debts, unequal trade and the brutal exploitation of cheap labor in our countries.

Cuba does not suffer from this problem to the same degree. We have achieved high educational levels; in elementary education we have surpassed the United States, the richest country in the world; we are already ahead of them in the infant mortality rate –almost 10% lower. A better rate, yes, and evenly distributed in all provinces too. There was a time when they had an average rate of 10 per 1,000 live births, now it is a bit over seven, this year nobody knows if it is going to be 7 or 8, there are still no final figures. And precisely this year it is almost certain that we shall have about 6.5 when it seemed impossible to go below 7. That is because of all those doctors, their dedication, because of health care workers and what they do to save lives.

That is why I say that no country has done the work that our people have carried out, more humane, more fair. Still, for many millions of people in the world, we are torturers, violators of human rights, totalitarian. Yes, we are totalitarian in as much as we have established total justice and a totally true humane spirit (Applause).

Democracy, multiple parties, how many parties do they want and what do they want them for? Because we can show them all they want. We can show them about seven or eight million parties.

I am speaking of a people who can read and write, and of young people who vote at the age of 16, young people who know about politics and who know what they are doing, the children of a country where citizens nominate local district candidates in free, open assemblies; where the Party cannot interfere, according to its own regulations, and is also prohibited from doing so by the electoral system; a system promoted by the party itself where almost 50% of the National Assembly –the final product of the process— is made up of delegates elected directly at the grassroots level, in the local voting district. This does not happen anywhere else. They had better research about this instead of go around launching empty slogans.

As I recently said in a press conference, we have a formula for those calling themselves dissidents: they should go to the assemblies where candidates are nominated and the polling stations where they are elected, because if the Revolution loses its majority, it loses power. All they have to do is win. Let them run in a voting district, at the grassroots level, in an area, because voting districts are divided into areas --they can be nominated in one or several of them. Let them go where the candidates are nominated by ordinary people y open assemblies; let them go to elections to be elected. And they do not need anything extra to take power in this country. It is not the Party that nominates and writes on a list, in the top positions, the people it wants to see elected after the polls have showed them the voters' inclinations with mathematical accuracy, that is, how many are going to be elected, and the party leadership says: "These are going to be the three deputies: numbers 1, 2 and 3 on our list." Such thing does not happen in Cuba.

All citizens have the right to nominate, to elect and be elected. All that is needed is merit. It is not because they have money or can pay for all the propaganda the same way that Coca-Cola, or a certain cigarette, or a certain car are announced, which as you know has a lot of influence in the final outcome. If that were not the case, the world would not spend a billion dollars on commercial advertising every year. The resources spent in just one of these election years would be enough to build all the schools the world needs, and top quality too; and with a small amount of the annual figure, they could offer school meals to all the children who need it, and pay teachers a decent salary.

Would not any sensible person believe that this would be somewhat better than spending a billion dollars on poisonous, stultifying propaganda aimed at filling the heads of billions of poor, humble people with dreams of having a luxury, state-of-the-art car, an exquisite watch manufactured in Switzerland, the most sophisticated clothes from Paris, London or New York, or telling them which razor blade to use, which soft drink to buy or which television set to buy for watching TV programs?

Why are a billion dollars spent? Because the one who does not resort to propaganda cannot make it. Why does a candidate with solid publicity win? Or why do they withdraw because they only have 18 million dollars, as they themselves say in the United States? Mrs. Dole, for instance, has just withdrawn because she only had 18 million dollars while Bush already had about 70 million. She gave up. Eighteen million is not enough, so I am going home. That is true democracy! Who would dare question it?

Money for publicity, and publicity to drive into people's heads who they have to vote for. And to plant there such a brilliant and transparent political idea, it is also necessary to fix a candidate's hairstyle, follow the strict instructions of image makers, write the speeches he has to deliver and persuade the masses of his tremendous statesmanship and enormous moral virtues to become a great president. Who actually elects in this system? Money and publicity; these are the main electors.

Such electors do not exist in our totalitarian country. The electors here are the eight million citizens aged 16 and up who go out to vote. In that super-democracy, citizens are so convinced of that trash and that hypocrisy that even if they have not fully intellectualized it, they react by instinct. They hold their right to vote in such high esteem that on election-day they go fishing, something unbelievable. Here, where voting is not compulsory, more than 95% of eligible voters go to the polling stations and in some

cases up to 98%, 99%, according to the voting district. And people really vote; some even cross out their ballot or write counterrevolutionary remarks. But those who go to vote, and do so honestly, amount to more than 90% of the electorate.

You know the way Cubans are. If they are not afraid to openly receive instructions from U.S. officials at the U.S. Interests Section, are they going to be afraid of not casting a vote? Could anyone here be so coerced? No, whoever knows Cubans knows that that is completely out of the question.

They have a lot of nerves, those people at the Interests Section! I can tell you that today, for instance, in their plan to sabotage the [Ibero-American] Summit, they had scheduled three meetings with three counterrevolutionary factions, in three different places in Havana and invited several journalists. Now, as you know, there are a lot of journalists here from all over. All right, journalists are curious people, interested in going to one place or another to see what is going on and they are invited to come and see the wonderful doctrine these groups are defending. So, of course, an Interests Section official had to be there, an official from another country that I do not want to mention because, after all, they do not do what the Interests Section does and he may have been invited. Naturally there were more journalists than gusanos [so-called dissidents]. Actually there were 11 of the latter, or so I was told by those who counted them.

There were two other meetings: one was to ponder on who knows what –it must have been idle talk. They were expecting who knows how many people. And the other one... I cannot even remember. So there were three meetings. At one them there were 11 of them, and more journalists than participants. At another there were nine of them. And at the other one there were five. There you can see their popularity, their strength, because they know that the people are very aware of their treacherous actions. The Interests Section has not been able to mask its shameful work or that of its accomplices in their plans against the Ibero-American Summit.

They said they were going to march carrying placards. We have the placards of the four or five people who provoked an incident with a group of high-school and technological institute students who were having a party at a park, and we showed them on television to the people and to all the press agencies, so that they could be copied and disseminated. What was most disappointing about those placards, and insulting – if we felt insulted by anything – were two major spelling mistakes in a five-word placard. And I said, "How embarrassing! After the huge effort we have made in this country so that people could read and write correctly!"

So, do you want to know? The plan suggested by their American tutors was to march for six blocks. Fortunately, there was the student party going on, and the teachers were there too.

Well, I am sorry, I could not see it, but yesterday they located the four people – I do not know if you have been following this –riding in the truck. We said, "We are going to locate those four", because it was said that someone had struck a foreign reporter TV camera with a hammer. So you can just imagine what they were going to say: that a journalist's equipment had been smashed with a hammer. Just imagine! Rampant fascism in Cuba, someone riding by in a truck smashing a TV camera with a hammer. We wanted to know exactly who they were, what truck was involved, find out what happened.

When I talked on television with the press agencies, only a few hours had gone by. We had not been able to locate the truck in just three hours. But yesterday, as soon as they heard what was said on television, that we wanted to locate the truck, the man with the hammer and two others who were with him showed up at the Domestic Trade ministry where they work hauling materials. They showed up spontaneously, because they were worried: "It was us. We found out on TV and came to explain what happened."

Today the four of them, the truck driver included, were interviewed on TV; they were the four missing witnesses. We thought there were three, but there were four of them who drove past the place of the incident in a truck. They have told the story of what happened and what they did. And tonight, at about

8:20 p.m., they were going to broadcast the interview so that everything would be public: the owner of the hammer and the story of those riding the truck with him.

Right now we do not know anything. We missed that episode. I am glad I missed it so that I could talk a bit with you. The four of them have already told their story, so tomorrow we will hear about it. Here we broadcast these things on television. People say, "Over there you never see the killer, you never see the one who seriously hurt a journalist." Here, those who are being accused, and who are in the news around the world, appear on television in record time. They are investigated and questioned in front of all the people.

I just looked at my watch. I think I have been talking for quite a while. (Laughter). I promise this will not take long, it cannot take much longer, because we even have a few other things to see to. We are about to begin the Summit. I had completely forgotten about the things I had to do in preparation for it (Laughter).

Actually, I have a very high opinion of these Ibero-American Summit Conferences, all their merits. I have high regard for these political summit conferences, but I also have a very high opinion of intellectual summit conferences, and for me that is what you are, especially courageous intellectuals, because all of us have lived through our special period. You have lived through these years, and so have we, but from these years we are going to draw tremendous strength. We have embraced the most beautiful and magnificent of causes and we know that these causes are defended, consolidated, advanced and made triumphant by ideas and by disseminating ideas and messages. It is by spreading the truth to create the subjective factors that the course of history can be accelerated, since we cannot simply wait for societies to explode, for the system to explode in a world populated by billions of people who do not even know what is going on, who do not even know what to think, what to do, what to expect or even if there is a chance or hope.

Those of us who do believe that there is a chance or hope, based on solid reasons, can convey this hope, can persuade others of this possibility, let us do our job. And this has nothing to do with parties, nor does it mean that we are against parties. The more there are --and truly left-wing parties-- the better, because things are not always what they seem.

I was recalling a cable I read recently. I was reading that even the Democratic Party, that is, the party of the Viet Nam War, of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the party that created the blockade against Cuba, which was later supported by successive presidents from the same party...I say the same party because both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party are so exactly alike that they have established a true one-party system, or better still, the most perfect single-party system in the world, through this fabulous mechanism of having two parties resembling each other like two peas in a pod.

Those parties are twins, identical twins, and those kinds of twins, in case you have forgotten, are born from one egg that divides into two parts and they resemble each other so much that if they lived in the same house even their spouses could not tell them apart. The U.S. Democratic Party was strongly mentioned at a recent congress of the Socialist International as a possible candidate for membership; yes, the party of the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts, that was behind the genocidal blockade against Cuba and that still sustains it, even though many of its members save the honor of the Party by opposing such a horrendous crime. Leaving aside brutal genocidal wars, such as the one that has just taken place in Europe, and the new strategic concepts of NATO, this movement is supposed to represent a major part of the world's left-wing forces in their unstoppable advance to the future, to progress, to justice, to democracy, to freedom. They have certainly gone far along that confusing third way!

We prefer our socialism with all its imperfections (Applause); we prefer the totalitarianism of truth, justice, sincerity, authenticity; the totalitarianism of truly humanitarian feelings; the totalitarianism of the type of multiparty system we practice.

We prefer the totalitarianism of eight million parties, eight million united parties, because they nominate

and they elect, because they draw guidelines, because they adopt and support policies, and because they discuss them from the grassroots to the highest state institutions. It is better than eighty parties, and it is better than that miracle of two parties in one tyrannizing U.S. society, a luminous example, a beacon and guide to the world.

It would be better to be blind so as not to see that light ever, and to walk alone, not even with a dog to guide us, because our own feet, our own instincts, would lead us through the correct path.

Let us shed light, because the possibilities of shedding light are there, the people are not blind. Some of the aforementioned things may be used to stultify them and are stultifying them. What is needed is an antidote against stultification, which is worse than AIDS. A remedy against stultification! A vaccine against stultification! And you have that vaccine, it is the truth aimed at people's minds and hearts.

The person standing before you is not in this hall for the first time, he was a student in this university more than 50 years ago who could have been taken for a lunatic, a dreamer, a Utopian. And I could say they were right if they took me for a lunatic, because thinking like I did in that society, in the world I lived in and in that university with more than 15,000 students, where McCarthyism and the media - the press, the movies and the radio; there was still no television-- periodicals, magazines, books, with very few exceptions, molded minds into a hatred of socialism, a submissive and servile admiration for the greatness of the empire that "had given us our independence", the same our forefathers had conquered with so much blood.

Although students were always rebellious, combative and idealistic, the number of openly anti-imperialist university students amounted to less than 50. These were the sad times when the minds of a whole people were blocked and deceived by the mass media in the hands of the bourgeoisie and the landowners allied to imperialism, serving imperialism, unconditional lackeys of imperialism.

Is it not true that most current U.S. society is vaccinated with the most efficient vaccine in the world against everything that smells of socialism? Their minds have been snatched away and turned into receivers of ideas instilled in them in the same way as the preference for a soft drink or a cigarette, their heads full of absurd biases and lies about the world.

The economic, social and political system that plunders the world is the one we denounce, the one we challenge, the one we deny the slightest right to consider itself democratic, fair and humanitarian. It is all a huge lie.

Who can persuade others in this world? Communicators, those who transmit messages, and the greater the effectiveness, grace, art, transparency, and courage with which they transmit them, with no concessions, the more people they will attract, the more minds they will free from lies.

Of course, we should not be alarmed nor discouraged. That system would not be safe even if none of you wrote a word for true and vital change.

When they speak of Cuba, they frequently speak of change. They try to ignore that the greatest change in a long time, the most radical change, is this with which Cuba has been able not only to exist but to resist. They speak of change, that is the fashionable word, but what is at stake or, at least, what is very urgently in need of change is that despicable existing world order. When it changes, all the countries in the world will have changed, even U.S. society itself.

Anyone with the slightest knowledge of arithmetic -not to mention mathematics - knows that no one will be able to save that society from a crisis worse than the 1929 crack, much worse, since 50% of the people in that country now have their savings invested in stocks, while in 1929 the figure was only 5%.

The world will change; that is unavoidable. But our duty is to help it change, the sooner the better, without waiting for the crisis to act as a big bang that is still propelling stars to infinity. We should

expect not a big-bang, but a big change –I have almost become an English translator, in spite of my bad pronunciation– and a big revolution (Laughter and applause). I say this because I believe it and because it is inescapable.

Could Luis Suarez have been right when he invited me to talk here? I mean, because he was putting pressure on me to talk to you at the closing of the congress, even when I did not know anything about what you had done or about what you had discussed, with a manifesto that I could not even read or hear well, what I was going to say here was, "This is not possible, because there are too many serious and important things happening here for me to get up on that rostrum and improvise something."

But I have not made a speech, I have simply let myself get carried away by the atmosphere, the joy of seeing you here, the confidence I have in what you can do, and that is why I said to myself, "Well, I will tell them a little about our journalists congress held at the beginning of the year."

A few days ago we had another congress, something that was called an extended council. Do you know something? We invited all the delegates who had attended the Congress, and we actually had a second congress. With great satisfaction the report stated that all agreements had been fulfilled and even overfulfilled.

Press organs have become teaching organs, and something unbelievable and inconceivable was done in the case of the doctors: they already have their own computer science teaching programs, and I understand that by the end of next year all our journalists will enter the third millenium having received an intensive and effective course on this subject. All journalists mastering computing, all of them with no exception (Applause); all of them with future possibilities of communicating with each other and the rest of the world through the Internet and computers, at a global and not only a national level (Applause). How great it would be if our fellow journalists could communicate one day with fellow journalists in Latin America through computers and the Internet!

All of them, in a not so distant future, will be studying a foreign language; 200 of them are already studying. There was not enough space; we looked into it, converted some facilities and soon the number of students enrolled in a foreign language course will increase to 400. Logically it will be basically English; have no choice, because we needed a tool, and since they have imposed English on the world, we are not going to start inventing a dialect now; still, dialects have to be zealously preserved and respected, because they are the creations of human culture. Therefore, and I do not mean any disrespect but it would not be possible to communicate in a dialect.

There are other languages that are very important, but very difficult too, for instance, Chinese. That is why many of these countries study English. Mastering another language and mastering English, and it will not be the only one. Now all we have to determine is the exact time in which almost 3,000 Cuban journalists will master a language, with excellent labs, excellent programs that fortunately are not too expensive.

But why have we doubled our enrollment capacity? We are already thinking not only about courses on techniques for writing in journalistic terms and other knowledge, but even on narrative techniques. All press organs, radio, TV, newspapers turned into schools where journalists will study systematically. Computer science studies are going to advance rapidly, because 40 or 50 facilities suffice; besides the schools, besides direct and practically specialized courses in computer science, there will be courses in the different press organs themselves.

All these ideas are being developed, and when we see that one of them has succeeded, we add new ideas and develop them.

We have great hopes on this road, on the possibility of upgrading our communicators to the top level. Any bibliography they may need, everywhere it is needed. We cannot send 2,000 or 3,000 volumes to each journalist, but we can have facilities with a given number of volumes not only on journalism but

also on general knowledge.

Do not take it as chauvinism, as a vain and childish ambition. I am only saying what we want for our journalists and wish that it were possible for all Latin American journalists and all journalists throughout the world: That our journalists can become, in time, a contingent that can be qualified as the best trained in the world. I will not say the best in the world, which is very different from saying, as a whole and in general terms, the best-trained journalists in the world, to work for the world, to wage a universal battle.

Do we want optimum reporting? Let them go where there is something to report, where doctors go, where any human group is doing extraordinary things. We do not have the millions of dollars that the transnationals have; no, we do not have financial capital, but we already have an excellent human capital.

The doctors I have been telling you about of whom over 1,000 are already working, and who in a not so distant future will amount to several thousand, reflect that human capital capable, that is, the people willing to go to places where, as a rule, the doctors from industrial nations would not go.

It is very unlikely that those having nice houses, three cars, four TV sets and all the domestic gadgets produced by their industries and who even dress in the latest fashion by the latest male or female couturier in Paris, New York or California will leave their families and go for an indefinite period –one year, a year and a half or two years– to places where there are snakes, mosquitoes and heat, where an incredible amount of devotion and sacrifice are required.

Those from rich countries would not do it even for 100,000 dollars, because they would rather have 50,000 or 60,000 dollars and stay where they are. They have not been reared in other concepts and other ideals. The most they do –those who are generous or philanthropists– is organize a small team and go to a country for a week. That is not bad, it is good: disseminating techniques, taking care of difficult cases. They do not go beyond that, except in some admirable cases. They do not spend more than a week on such missions.

They have infinite financial capital and almost zero human capital. We are doing things with zero financial capital and, I am not going to say infinite, but substantial human capital created throughout these 40 years. I want to ask you if a Third World country divided into 1,000 pieces, in constant and eternal instability, with no program or anything like it could have done this.

These are the facts that feed our conviction, our determination, our hope; these are the arguments we can use in the struggle. And I am not asking you to defend us; I am asking for a high awareness of the facts of the world today, the denunciation of the horrors of the system we are suffering, which can even lead to the obliteration of the human species.

This abominable system – I said so that day when I was talking with a group of journalists during a break – is not only driving humankind to its physical annihilation, but is spiritually destroying it too, turning human beings into selfish individuals, blindly competing with each other, enemies of all the rest; turning the citizens of every country into liars and greedy, selfish and false people.

Can a people be educated by politicians who only feel what they do not say and say what they do not feel? For instance, President Clinton himself – with all due respect – has a discourse for New York, another one for Florida, another one for the state of Washington; a discourse for Hispanics, another one for Asians and still another one for Afro-Americans; a discourse for every one of them; a discourse for every country he visits. Sometimes a president makes mistakes; this is what happened to Reagan, who spoke to Brazilians as if he was in Bolivia. You heard about this. I do not know if it was a lapsus linguae or a cultural blunder; actually both countries are unmistakable.

But they are not to blame, they did not learn it in school, they do not usually receive a sound political

training. It would be more accurate to say that the system prevents it. If the only concept they are aware of is competition and the individual struggle between human beings, if they only believe in the power of their weapons and their wealth, how can they possibly be educated with a humanist concept of tomorrow's world?

I talk, I discuss things with a lot of politicians, of different standing, and not only from the United States, among whom I have seen, without a doubt, highly trained and serious people; but at times I am appalled. It is like this: Three assistants on one side and three on the other, and whatever the topic, this one passes a piece of paper, the other passes another. It is tragic. Worse still, it is a lack of courtesy, because if you have to wait for all the sheets of paper to be passed around and try to guess what the topic was that brought this about, what the crucial point was which triggered this conditioned reflex, how you can help your distinguished guest out with information, then the line of the conversation is lost and the impression is one of rudeness.

I do not wish to specify countries, because whatever the country, we have many friends; but I have seen prominent people from countries which boast about being among the best informed in the world, or countries which have access to the most advanced information media, and yet their citizens are completely disinformed, they know nothing about the world, and some even have university degrees. They cannot read, they cannot study.

We often send documents to important people in the hope that their assistants will read them; we give them to the assistants as well. We can hardly ever be sure that they have had time to read an important piece of information in line with their political interests; but what is worse, often not even the assistants read them.

I am telling you about experiences that we have had to live through. They do not have enough time to study, they cannot read, swept up in a whirlpool of activities which often boils down to nothing more than spending their entire time, every free day, going around from house to house, knocking on the voters' doors. Any sense of national interest? Very little! The speeches made by each of the representatives from some of these countries, and the attitudes they display, are about nothing other than the defense of the interests of the ethnic group, or the economic group, or the social group based in their electoral district.

We have always told our deputies that they must defend the interests of the district that elected them but that they must always defend, above all else, the nation's best interests, so that it is not a question of "I am concerned with this place, and nothing else matters to me."

Today, on the eve of the [Ibero-American] Summit, we are saying that what we are least concerned about is our own interests, and we have discussed the documents based on our concern for the interests of others; and more than that, for the collective interests of our region, of Latin America and the Caribbean. There is no doubt that globalization exists, the world is inevitably moving in that direction. What is it going to be like? That will very much depend on how clear we are now and what we are capable of achieving today.

What can we offer you? We can strongly urge you not to be discouraged by anything or anybody; we can strongly urge you not to be intimidated by the overwhelming power of the bosses in the press agencies and the media, that nowadays are not just national, but are often transnational, and which threaten integrity; and above all, they threaten the culture of every country in the world, as a major instrument of domination.

We are forever looking for mechanisms and methods to transmit messages. In fact, the messages are sent out to tens and tens of thousands of people. Solidarity groups, courageous and untiring friends of Cuba, despite adverse conditions and a lack of material resources, play an outstanding role in the battle against disinformation and lies. There are times when they sell 20% of the published lectures or speeches, and with what they earn, they print another 1,000, which they then distribute in places not

reached by other sources of information.

Every day we are looking for new ways to carry written and televised material, by means of tapes, the Internet and all viable media. Having racked our brains over this, we now have the possibility of sending information to many places simultaneously.

A newspaper, for example, that is sold on the street, with a press run of 10,000 copies, reaches the 10,000 family units of those people who buy it, and sometimes we transmit 100,000 messages to those people whom we want to inform. We can transmit millions of messages, and we have a good idea of how to do it. There are ways of counteracting the enormous power of the monopoly held by the information media and its bosses; the slaves, that is, the journalists who are the proletariat of the media have infinite possibilities before them.

I did not have the privilege of taking part in your congress but I have kept you sitting there for such a long time and created a disaster on the eve of the Summit, not because of what I have said, because I do not mind if what I have said becomes common knowledge, even though I am talking to you in confidence, among friends: the problem is with the time because it is already past midnight. I have thought of a way to sort of compensate you generously, that is, by holding a congress of Latin American journalists. (Applause)

At the start of this year we met with hundreds of economists from various parts of the world, using different languages - I am talking about foreign economists. I do not remember if there were 500 or 600, in addition to a strong Cuban delegation. If we are organizing a similar gathering of economists again, at the start of next year and if there is going to be a congress of Latin American students with 5,000 delegates in a few months time, then why shouldn't there be a congress of Latin American journalists? I am suggesting it.

Obviously, I would like it to be here, because if it is held elsewhere, it is most likely that I would not be able to take part, it would be too problematic. I cost a lot more when I travel, believe me, because I need to take two planes to throw them off the track, so that they do not know which one I am in; that is how it is, it is more expensive for me to travel than for this country to invite 200 or 300 proletariat journalists, with their own criteria. No, no, we do not want just Marxists, no, it is not about that. We do not have the slightest objection to people of all creeds and philosophies participating; we want honest journalists with their own opinions to debate these problems; truly independent journalists to tackle the ways and means of fighting, and among them, a number of Cuban delegates, several dozen; we are left with no other option, if we do not want to quarrel with too many members of the Journalists Union of Cuba.

The issue of numbers is important. Meetings can be held with several hundred people. If it is held in a very large theatre then people cannot see; if it is held in a place where 300 or 400 people can meet, experience tells us that it is possible to discuss things in a truly relaxed manner. The time? Well, the time that is needed, but in the same way as we did it here, because by discussing, thinking, contemplating, setting out problems, difficulties, that is how many solutions are found, I assure you.

How wonderful it would be, not this modest congress organized by FELAP, which is very modest, because there are only 30 or 40 delegates here. How many people came to this? (They tell him 40) They say forty. It is true that Lenin organized the Bolshevik Party of the Soviet Union at a congress of 10 or 12 delegates. I think that if we gather together 300 or 400 journalists, with the specified characteristics, then we can call it a congress. No more, because it would be less fruitful; no more, because this way it is within the limits of what a congress can give, like the ones we have organized this year. We have had two for Cuban journalists within seven months.

Allow me to tell you that our journalists are in a very high spirit. They have a stack of tasks, and when it seemed like it was too much for us, we started coming up with new ideas and taking initiatives to increase the number of journalists, despite the fact that there are only two daily newspapers; but

considering all the children's publications, magazines and the television and radio broadcasts, we are preparing ourselves for the huge task ahead. There is plenty of enthusiasm. What people have always needed is a great cause. You will never have a great people without a great cause. When there is a great cause, many, many people, almost everyone can be a great writer, a great journalist, a great communicator. Our journalists have that great cause today, they have it well identified and perfectly defined.

If we hold a meeting of this sort, FELAP will have much more clout. And believe me, the owners do not want unions, nor guilds, nor organization for the slaves; one way or another they want to keep them in chains and in shackles.

Let us say: Proletarians of all the media in the world, educate yourselves and unite! (Applause)

I said educate yourselves because that is what we are doing when we take stock of the huge necessity to constantly improve. Our national organization of journalists is turning into a university, into a higher education center for journalism where there is no limit to learning. Let us always feel that way. That is how we see and conceive of the role of journalists in the forthcoming century. (Applause)

(A delegate says something to him.)

They consider me to be a member of FELAP, do you agree? (Exclamations of: "Yes!") Thank you.

I ask you to think about this idea, of a congress more or less along the lines of the one we have been trying to design, with all the time needed, working morning, noon and night, to deal with problems, not just in our country, but crucial problems in today's world. Now that we are talking about globalization, we have to globalize our way of thinking, moving away from thinking just about individual places, small, medium or large, and standing firmly on the planet where we are obliged to live.

The culture sector also held an impressive congress. It was extremely productive. Of course, cultural activities are not as homogenous as those in the field of journalism. Those could hardly be more complex, it is not possible to measure the achievements with the same speed.

The number of intellectuals in our country and their works are growing rapidly. I use the word intellectual, on the basis of a concept I discussed with our journalists: journalists are intellectual workers. Many of the best novels have been written by journalists, who know how to write, who are knowledgeable about life, have a high level of culture and a vivid imagination. Gabriel García Márquez started out as a journalist, a journalist with Prensa Latina, when the agency was created, and thus many others have turned out to be excellent authors. I would say that a writer should master the techniques of journalism, and that a journalist should master the techniques of a writer, a novelist.

Perhaps the room in the Palacio de las Convenciones, where we held the congress of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, and shortly afterwards the one for journalists, would be the best place for the type of gathering that I am suggesting. Thus the task is yours and everything depends on you. Can I leave with the hope that you like the idea? (Applause and exclamations of: "Yes!")

So, I will say, like Julius Caesar - according to what they claim he said, because I believe that 90% of those sayings are myths which someone invented afterwards, I have had experience of it, seeing how each one has his views of important facts that we have shared: "Alea jacta est."

As you can see, I speak English and I speak Latin (Laughter and applause).

Thank you very much!

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