

CUBA WILL NEITHER NEGOTIATE NOR SELL OUT ITS REVOLUTION WHICH HAS COST THE BLOOD AND SACRIFICE OF MANY OF ITS SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Autor:

- [Mayor Zaragoza, Federico](#)

To the readers:

At the beginning of this month of June, a French magazine published a summary of the notes taken by Mr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, former Director General of UNESCO, during a conversation with President Fidel Castro last January 28 while he visited Cuba to take part in the II International Economists Workshop held in Havana from the 24th to the 28th of that month.

A few days before June 1, Mr. Mayor had forwarded a copy of that summary as well as a number of questions on similar subjects intended for another publication. However, even before the aforementioned synthesis was published, some press dispatches were already printing phrases taken out of context and wrong interpretations of his notes.

Later, the premature publication of that incomplete text with the wrong interpretations --at a time when our country was involved, as it is still today, in an intensive activity associated to the struggle against the criminal kidnapping of the Cuban child Elián González-- forced comrade Fidel to find the minimum time indispensable to accurately respond, one by one, the 33 questions submitted by Mr. Mayor. That text was forwarded to him 10 days ago.

He then expressed his idea to use the full content in a book he is planning to publish at the end of this year. But, aware that many of the subjects touched upon by the questions and answers relate to current issues that might not bear the same interest several months from now, comrade Fidel has decided to publish the full text in Granma. Of course, he previously informed this decision to his respected and distinguished friend Mr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, former Director General of UNESCO.

Following are the questions and answers.

FEDERICO MAYOR.- With China, Vietnam and North Korea, Cuba is considered the last bulwark of socialism. Yet, ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, does the word "socialism" make sense any more?

FIDEL CASTRO.- Today I am more convinced than ever that it makes a great deal of sense.

What happened ten years ago was the naive and unwitting destruction of a great social historical process that needed to be improved, but not destroyed. This had not been achieved by Hitler's hordes, not even by killing over 20 million Soviets and devastating half of the country. The world was left under the aegis of a single superpower, which had not contributed even five percent of the sacrifices made by the Soviets in the fight against fascism.

In Cuba, we have a united country and a Party those guides but does not nominate or elect. The people, gathered in open assemblies, put up candidates, nominate and elect delegates from 14,686 districts;

these are the foundation of our electoral system. They make up the assemblies of their respective municipalities, and nominate candidates to the provincial and national assemblies, the highest bodies of state power at those levels. The delegates, who are chosen through a secret ballot, must receive over 50% of the valid votes in their corresponding jurisdictions.

Although voting is not compulsory, over 95% of eligible voters take part in these elections. Many people in the world have not even bothered to look into these facts.

The United States, such a vocal advocate of multi-party systems, has two parties that are so perfectly similar in their methods, objectives and goals that they have practically created the most perfect one-party system in the world. Over 50% of the people in that "democratic country" do not even cast a vote, and the team that manages to raise the most funds often wins with the votes of only 25% of the electorate. The political system is undermined by disputes, vanity and personal ambition or by interests groups operating within the established economic and social model and there is no alternative for a change in the system.

When the small English-speaking nations of the Caribbean achieved independence, they put into place a more efficient parliamentary system where the ruling party remains in power as long as it enjoys consensus. This is much more stable than the presidential regime imposed to the rest of Latin America, which copied the U.S. model. And, nothing has changed in almost two centuries.

Under capitalism it is the large national and international companies that actually govern, even in the most highly industrialized nations. It is they who make the decisions on investment and development. It is they who are responsible for material production, essential economic services, and a large part of social services. The state simply collects taxes and then distributes and spends them. In many of these countries, the entire government could go on vacation and nobody would even notice.

The developed capitalist system, which later gave rise to modern imperialism, has finally imposed a neoliberal and globalized order that is simply unsustainable. It has created a world of speculation where fictitious wealth and stocks have been created that have nothing to do with actual production, as well as enormous personal fortunes, some of which exceed the gross domestic product of dozens of poor countries. No need to add the plundering and squandering of the world's natural resources and the miserable lives of billions of people. There is nothing this system can offer humanity. It can only lead to its own self-destruction and perhaps along with it to the destruction of the natural conditions that sustain human life on this planet.

The end of history, as predicted by a few euphoric dreamers, is not here, yet. Perhaps it is actually just beginning.

F.M.- Forty-one years after the Revolution, and despite all of the difficulties it has had to confront, the regime that you established has endured. What could be the reason for this longevity?

F.C.- The tireless struggle and work alongside the people and for the people. The fact that we have settled for convictions and acted accordingly; that we believe in humankind and in being our country's slaves and not its masters. We believe in building upon solid principles, in seeking out and producing solutions, even in apparently impossible and unreal conditions; in preserving the honesty of those with the highest political and administrative responsibilities, that is, in transforming politics into a priesthood. This could be a partial answer to your question, setting aside many other elements particularly related to our country and this historical era.

Of course, everybody thought that Cuba would not survive the collapse of the socialist camp and the USSR. One could certainly wonder how it was possible to withstand a double blockade and the economic and political warfare unleashed against our country by the mightiest power ever without the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, without credits. However, we managed to achieve this feat. At a summit meeting recently held in Havana, I somewhat ironically said to our guests that it had

been possible because we had the privilege of not being IMF members.

There were times when we were swimming in a sea of circulating money. Our national currency experienced an extraordinary devaluation, and the budget deficit reached 35% of our gross domestic product. I could see intelligent visitors almost faint from shock. Our peso, the national currency, dropped to a value of 150 to the dollar in 1994. In spite of this, we did not close down a single health care center, a single school or daycare center, a single university, and a single sports facility. Nobody was fired and left on his own without employment or social security, even when fuel and raw materials were most scarce. There was not even a trace of the customary and hideous shock policies so highly recommended by the Western financial institutions.

Every measure adopted to confront the terrible blow was discussed not only in the National Assembly, but also in hundreds of thousands of assemblies held in factories, centers of production and services, trade unions, universities, secondary schools and farmers, women and neighbors' organizations as well as other social groups. What little was available, we distributed as equitably as possible. Pessimism was overcome both inside the country and outside.

During those critical years, the number of doctors was doubled, and the quality of education was improved. The value of the Cuban peso increased sevenfold, from 150 to the dollar to 20 to the dollar, between 1994 and 1998, and has since remained consistently stable. Not a single dollar fled the country. We acquired experience and efficiency on a par with the immense challenge facing us. Although we have still not reached the production and consumption levels we had before the demise of socialism in Europe, we have gradually recovered at a steady and visible pace. Our education, health and social security rates, as well as many other social features, which were the pride of our country, have been preserved, and some have even been improved.

The great hero in this feat has been the people, who have contributed tremendous sacrifices and immense trust. It was the fruit of justice and of the ideas sowed throughout over 30 years of Revolution. This genuine miracle would have been impossible without unity and without socialism.

F.M.- In view of the vast movement towards globalization taking place worldwide, would it not perhaps be advisable to open up more the Cuban economy to the rest of the world?

F.C.- We have opened up the economy to the extent that it has been possible and necessary. We have not gone for the same insanity and follies as in other places, where the recommendations of European and American experts have been followed as if they were Biblical prophets. We have not been driven by the insanity of privatization, and much less by that of confiscating state property to take it over ourselves or hand it out as gifts to relatives or friends. This happened, as we all know, in both former socialist countries and in others that never were socialists, under the pious, tolerant, and complicit cover of the neoliberal philosophy that has become a universal pandemic. The West is well aware of where the money is deposited and what has happened to the embezzled or stolen funds, but nobody has said a word about it.

We have not attempted to commit the folly of adapting Cuba to the chaotic world of today and its philosophy. What we have done is to adapt those realities to our own, while fighting alongside many other countries of the so-called Third World for our right to development and survival. This might perhaps be the way for our former colonies to help the minority of very wealthy countries, most of them former colonial powers, to save themselves as well.

F.M.- Nobody questions Cuba's social and cultural achievements. However, taking back my previous question, would these achievements not be better served by an increase in exchange with the outside world?

F.C.- It is true that, as you say, we have achieved major social advances that can hardly be denied. There is schooling for all of our children, and no illiteracy. The development of our universities is

considerable. We have numerous research centers that carry out important high-quality work. Every child is given 13 vaccines, almost all of them produced in our own country, as is the case with most medicines used. At the same time, thousands of our doctors are providing their services, free of charge, in remote and impoverished areas of Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa as part of comprehensive health care programs. This is possible because we have plenty of human capital.

We have invited the most developed countries to cooperate by sending medications. We are also granting thousands of scholarships to young Third World people to study medicine and other specialties in our universities. In every African country participating in the comprehensive health care programs, we are helping to establish schools that can eventually train the hundreds of thousands of doctors they need.

No one could imagine what a small Third World country with extremely limited resources could achieve when a true spirit of solidarity prevails. As to your question, there is no doubt that the efforts undertaken by our country could be boosted by an increase in the exchange with the outside world, to the benefit of both our own homeland and other nations.

F.M.- The demise of the USSR suddenly deprived Cuba of precious aid. In your opinion, what was the United States' purpose in maintaining the embargo despite the end of the East-West confrontation? Did they hope to influence your form of government?

F.C.- They were not trying to influence the Revolution but to destroy it. Just as the Senate in ancient Rome proclaimed the destruction of Carthage in the times of Hannibal, the U.S. administrations obsessively pursued motto has been: Cuba must be destroyed.

The demise of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the European socialist bloc did not take us completely by surprise. We had even warned our people of this possibility long before. The stupid mistakes and shameful concessions constantly made to their longstanding enemy clearly pointed to what was coming.

In economic terms, Cuba sustained terrible damage. The price we were paid for our sugar was not that prevailing in the unfair world market. We had obtained a preferential price, like that applied by the United States and Europe to imports of this commodity. Supplies of fuel, food, raw material and parts for machinery and factories were abruptly and almost completely cut off. The daily intake of calories dropped from 3000 to 1900, and that of protein from 80 to 50 grams. Some people could not put up with the difficulties but the immense majority confronted the hardships with remarkable courage, honor and determination.

As I said earlier, we managed to maintain important achievements, and some were even improved. Infant mortality was reduced by 40% in this period, and 30,000 new medical doctors with excellent training went to work in our communities. In the field of sports, our athletes continued to occupy a place of honor among the world's best, with the highest number of gold medals per capita in the Olympics, despite the tremendous pressure by the United States and other wealthy countries in an attempt to entice Cuban scientists, outstanding professionals and athletes.

F.M.- But, this does not mean that the continuation of the embargo is another test that the Cuban people can easily overcome.

F.C.- The blockade, of course, is a painful burden for each and every Cuban. The Third World nations, as well as most of UN member countries, have repeatedly demanded the lifting of the blockade. But the U.S. Congress, with the cooperation of many members of the Republican majority, headed up in this case by Mr. Helms and Mr. Burton, and even with the support of several Democratic Party members, such as Mr. Torricelli and others, has opposed the lifting of this blockade, which is by far the longest lasting in history.

F.M.- The United States is not the only country imposing all sorts of conditions to your country. The European Union has also tried to introduce a "democracy clause" in European-Cuban trade relations. What do you think of this action?

F.C.- It is significant that the European Union shows much less "concern" about other countries, doubtlessly because they are of a greater economic interest than we ever could. In any case, all conditioning becomes unacceptable when the inalienable principles of our homeland are involved. The political organization adopted by a sovereign nation cannot be subjected to conditions. Cuba will neither negotiate nor sell out its Revolution, which has cost the blood and the sacrifice of many of its sons and daughters.

On the other hand, it all depends on what is meant by "democracy clause." How many so-called "democratic" states are up to their necks in debt? How many of them allow up to 30% of the population to live in conditions of extreme poverty? Why should countries with tens of thousands of children wandering the streets and countless numbers of illiterate people be treated better than we are? We do not see why this should be so. Cuba will never accept political conditions from the European Union, and much less from the United States. This should be definitely understood.

We do not argue about whether the countries in Europe are monarchies or republics, or whether power is held by conservatives or social democrats, advocates or adversaries of an idyllic third option; swings to the left, to the center or to the right; supporters or detractors of the so-called "welfare state" used as a palliative for the incurable disease of unemployment. We do not feel the urge to express our views on the actions of the skinheads and the upsurge of neo-Nazi tendencies, although we have our own idea about these and many other issues; but we do not introduce revolutionary clauses in our relations with Europe. We rather hope the Europeans will work things out by themselves.

F.M.- Since the days of McCarthyism, Washington has tended to consider that the only regimes that are harmful and must be eliminated are the communist regimes. But the White House has tolerated, without blinking, the likes of Somoza, Trujillo, Duvalier and others. What are your thoughts on this "double-standard" approach?

F.C.- It would be better not to delve into the hypocrisy and indecency of that policy. It would take many hours and lengthy historical references. The market will dry up some day for the industry of lies; it is drying up already. If you really delve into the truth, you will realize that the political conception of imperialism, as well as the neoliberal economic order and globalization process imposed on the world, is orphaned and defenseless when it comes to ideas and ethics. It is in this field that the main struggle of our times will be decided. And the final result of this battle, with no possible alternative, will be on the side of truth, and thus on the side of humanity.

F.M.- Do you follow the U.S. electoral process closely?

F.C.- Of course, and not just the presidential campaign. I also find it amusing to watch other features of that great comedy. To offer an example: the fight for the New York Senate seat. With regard to Hillary Clinton, I remember when she appeared before Congress and so brilliantly defended a social program for medical services, which are beyond the reach of millions of poor people in America.

I also listened with interest when she addressed the World Health Organization in Geneva. She was candid, persuasive, and seemingly sincere. She conducted herself with great dignity when her family was caught up in a difficult and painful crisis. But sometimes her advisors do not give her very good advice, as in the case of the Puerto Ricans freed by the Clinton administration after a long, cruel and merciless imprisonment. She publicly opposed this reduction in sentences. I could add that very recently, in the case of the kidnapped Cuban boy Elián González, her position was wrong and quite unethical when she said that the boy's father should defect. This was a grave and unwarranted insult to an honorable patriot. At that point she coincided not only in content but also in timing, almost the exactly, with the Republican candidate to the presidency.

Actually, when seemingly honest people are caught up in the turmoil of U.S. electoral politics, they run the risk of losing prestige and recognition.

F.M.- How far can the privatization process go in Cuba? As for the "dollarization" of the economy, is it not an insult to both socialism and the country's monetary sovereignty?

F.C.- I have already said that privatization should be carried out with much common sense and wisdom, avoiding irrational actions. You need to make a clear distinction between different kinds of work. Some tasks are highly individual and often manual and craft-like; their large-scale production and technology are not fundamental. However, there are investments that require capital, technology and markets, in which associations with foreign companies can be highly advisable. The potential oil deposits in the 110,000 square kilometers of the Gulf of Mexico belonging to Cuba could not be explored or exploited by our country without technology and capital from abroad.

On the other hand, within the country, when it comes to obtaining the highest quality and yield in special crops like tobacco -the work of dedicated and almost fanatical lovers of this type of farming, which should be manual and carried out on small plots of land- no machine or big company could replace the individual work. Those people with these special qualities are given the land they need, free of charge, in order to farm it on their own. But, it would be absurd to do the same with huge sugar cane plantations that are highly mechanized.

In the Cuban farming sector, there are different forms of ownership: individual property, cooperatives and various forms of cooperated production. Also procurement and marketing state enterprises have successfully developed.

At the same time, in a wide range of economic sectors, there are production and marketing associations with foreign companies that work perfectly well.

We it comes to privatization one should not be simplistic. The general principle in Cuba goes that nothing that is advisable and possible to preserve as the property of all of the people or of a collective of workers will be privatized.

Our ideology and our preference is socialist, which bears no relation whatsoever to the selfishness, privileges and inequalities of capitalist society. In our homeland, nothing will pass into the hands of a high ranking official, and nothing will be given away to accomplices and friends. Nothing that can be efficiently exploited for the benefit of our society will pass into the hands of either Cuban or foreign individuals. At the same time, I can assure you that the safest investments in the world are those authorized in Cuba, which are protected by law and by the country's honor.

As to the reference you made to the dollarization of the economy, I should say two things. Firstly, the world economy is currently dollarized. After Bretton Woods, the United States acquired the privilege of issuing the reserve currency of the world economy. Secondly, there is a national currency in Cuba that is not ruled in any way by the International Monetary Fund. As I noted earlier, that currency has experienced a sevenfold increase in value, and in record time. There is no flight of capital.

At the same time, a convertible peso has been established, on a par with the dollar whose free circulation was simply an unavoidable need, not the result of an economic conception. I believe that in the future it will never be necessary again to ban the possession of dollars or other foreign currencies, but its free circulation for the payment of many goods and services will only last for as long as the interests of the Revolution make it advisable. Therefore, we are not concerned about the famous phrase "the dollarization of the economy." We know very well what we are doing.

F.M.- Fidel, you publicly said to me in Havana in 1997: "Federico, today there is no need for revolutions. As of now, the struggle will be for better sharing. Our objective is no longer the class struggle but the

rapprochement of the classes within the framework of just and peaceful coexistence." Three years later, do you still think the same way?

F.C.- I am not sure that I ever made those exact comments. It might be a misunderstanding associated to voice inflexion or interpretation, because some of those points are quite distant from my ideas.

I recently attended an international economist meeting in Havana. Among participants there were representatives of financially distressed countries where debt servicing accounts for over 40% of budget spending. Previous and acting governments acquired such debts "very democratically". There is clearly a great sense of helplessness in the face of the challenges posed by an inevitable globalization process marked so far by the fatal sign of neoliberalism. At that meeting, the representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank defended their points of view with complete freedom, but for many of those present the conclusions were very clear regarding the unsustainable nature of the prevailing economic order.

It is not possible to continue along the path that widens the gap between the poor and the rich countries and produces increasingly serious social inequalities within them all. At the moment, Latin American and Caribbean integration is fundamental. It is only by joining together that we can negotiate our role in this hemisphere and the same applies to the Third World countries vis à vis the powerful and insatiable club of the wealthy. I have often noted that such integration and joining of forces cannot wait for profound social changes or social revolutions to take place within these individual countries.

I have also said that because the current world economic order is unsustainable, it faces the very real danger of a catastrophic collapse, infinitely worse than the disaster and prolonged crisis set off in 1929 by the crash of the U.S. stock markets, where stocks had been inflated beyond sustainable levels. Not even the enthusiastic and highly experienced Allan Greenspan, chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve –whose sleepless eyes do not stray for a minute from the statistical data emanating from the uncontrollable and unpredictable roulette wheel that is the speculative system, in which 50% of U.S. families have placed their bets and invested their savings– would dare to claim that this danger does not exist. The remedy to prevent it has not been invented, nor can it be invented within such a system.

I tirelessly insist on the need for people to open their eyes to these realities. A collapse could occur before the people are prepared for it. The changes will not spring forth from anyone's head, but the heads must be prepared for these inevitable changes, which will take on a wide variety of forms and follow a wide variety of paths. From my point of view, the changes will fundamentally result from the action of the masses, which nothing would succeed in holding back.

Nevertheless, nothing will be easy. The blindness, superficiality and irresponsibility of the so-called political class will make the road more difficult, but not impregnable.

F.M.- Is there any hope for the poor to achieve a better life in the next 20 years?

F.C.- Humanity is beginning to gain awareness. Look at what happened in Seattle and in Davos.

People frequently talk about the horrors of the holocaust and the genocide that have taken place throughout the century, but they seem to forget that every year, as a result of the economic order we have been discussing here, tens of millions of people starve to death or die of preventable diseases. They can wield statistics of apparently positive growth but in the end things remain the same or even worsen in the Third World countries. Growth often rests on the accumulation of consumer goods that contribute nothing to true development and a better distribution of wealth. The truth is that after several decades of neoliberalism, the rich are becoming increasingly richer while the poor are both more numerous and increasingly poorer.

F.M.- At the recent summit of the Group of 77 held in April in Havana, you put forward a series of ideas to reform of the international order. Could you repeat those proposals?

F.C.- At the summit, I advocated for the cancellation of the least developed countries' external debt and for a considerable debt relief for many others. I also spoke out for the removal of the International Monetary Fund. It is time that the Third World countries demand to be freed from a mechanism that has not ensured the stability of the world economy. In general, I censured the fatal impact of the hypocritical neoliberal policies on every underdeveloped country, particularly the Latin American and Caribbean countries. I said that another Nuremberg trial was needed to pass sentence on the genocide committed by the current world economic order.

F.M.- That is a bit of an overstatement!

F.C.- Perhaps not. It might be a bit of an understatement. For the sake of precision, I shall quote a few paragraphs from my closing speech at the South Summit:

"People used to talk about apartheid in Africa; today we could talk about apartheid throughout the world, where over four billion people are deprived of the most basic rights of all human beings: the right to life, to health, to education, to clean drinking water, to food, to housing, to employment, to hope for their future and the future of their children. At the present pace, we will soon be deprived even of the air we breathe, increasingly poisoned by the wasteful consumer societies that pollute the elements essential for life and destroy human habitat."

[...]

"The wealthy world tries to forget that the sources of underdevelopment and poverty were slavery, colonialism and the brutal exploitation and plunder to which our countries were subjected for centuries. They look upon us as inferior nations. They attribute the poverty we suffer to the inability of Africans, Asians, Caribbean and Latin Americans, in other words, of black-skinned, yellow-skinned, indigenous and mixed-race peoples, to achieve any degree of development, or even to govern ourselves."

[...]

"I am firmly convinced that the current economic order imposed by the wealthy countries is not only cruel, unfair, inhuman, and contrary to the inevitable course of history, but is also inherently racist. It reflects racist conceptions like those that once inspired the Nazi holocausts and concentration camps in Europe, mirrored today in the so-called refugee camps in the Third World, which actually serve to concentrate the effects of poverty, hunger and violence. These are the same racist conceptions that inspired the obnoxious system of apartheid in Africa."

[...]

"We are fighting for the most sacred rights of the poor countries; but we are also fighting for the salvation of a First World incapable of preserving the existence of the human species, of governing itself --overwhelmed by contradictions and self-serving interests-- and much less of governing the world, whose leadership must be democratically shared. We are fighting --it could almost be demonstrated mathematically-- to preserve life on our planet."

In summary, Federico: it is urgent that we fight for our survival, the survival of all countries, both rich and poor, because we are all on the same boat. In this regard, I made a very concrete proposal at the Summit concerning a delicate and complex issue: I asked the Third World oil-exporting countries to grant preferential prices to the least developed countries, similar to what was done in the San José Pact, signed 20 years ago by Venezuela and Mexico, which allows Central American and Caribbean countries to buy oil on more lenient terms.

F.M.- Is your opinion about the United Nations as severe?

F.C.- Not at all, although I consider its structure an anachronism. After 55 years of existence, it is essential to reestablish the organization. The United Nations should be worthy of its name: the members should be truly united by genuinely humane and far-reaching objectives. All of the member countries, big and small, developed and underdeveloped, should have the real possibility of making their voices heard. The UN should constitute a great meeting place, where all views can be expressed and discussed. It should operate on truly democratic bases. It is important for groups like the G-77 and the Non-Aligned Countries Movement to act within the United Nations system.

The United Nations structure should be transformed, so that the organization can play a major role in today's world. Social development, for example, is presently one of the most dramatically urgent needs in the Third World, and the mission of the World Bank is not to contribute funds to resolve financial crises but rather to promote social development. The absence of such development is the greatest tragedy of our times.

F.M.- Looking at a world map, what changes would you like to make?

F.C.- I would be thinking of a world worthy of the human species, without hyper-wealthy and wasteful nations on the one hand and countless countries mired in extreme poverty on the other; a world in which all identities and cultures were preserved, a world with justice and solidarity; a world without plundering, oppression or wars, where science and technology were at the service of humankind; a world where nature was protected and the great throng of people living on the planet today could survive, grow and enjoy the spiritual and material wealth that talent and labor could create.

No need to ask; I dream of a world that the capitalist philosophy will never make possible.

F.M.- What do you think of the evolution of Latin America as a whole?

F.C.- I think that it has lost almost 200 years of history in its social development and political integration. Some Latin American countries have a great many more economic resources than Cuba, which has been blockaded for over 40 years now. But if you take a good look at them, it turns out that in many of these countries, a third of the population cannot read or write, that millions of Latin Americans lack even a roof to shelter them, that these countries are so highly indebted that their development is practically impossible.

The Latin American debt is so large that many nations in the region, no matter what their gross domestic product may be, do not guarantee a decent quality of life to most of their people. Their economies, which sometimes appear to be doing well according to the macroeconomic figures, have fallen prey to major financial and technological powers. All of these economies are subject to flights of capital to the wealthy countries, in amounts that nobody fully knows or can calculate. Their weak currencies are defenseless against the attacks of speculators. The hard currency reserves with which they attempt to defend their economies at the high cost of idle funds that do not contribute to economic and social development, are lost in a matter of days when faced with any danger of devaluation. Incomes earned through a privatization that gives away national heritage are lost without providing the slightest benefit. The threat of a financial crisis or devaluation turns all forms of capital flight-over-night capital, including both the short-term loans and the funds of nationals terrified by the imminent risk of seeing their savings dwindle.

The handy formula of endlessly raising interests rates renders the country's economic life chaotic and complicated. Latin America, like the rest of the Third World, is a victim of the international economic order imposed, the same I have already described as unsustainable. Divided and balkanized as they are, and seduced by deceptive illusions of progress and development emanating from the siren song of a hemispheric free trade agreement, the countries of Latin America are in danger of forever losing their independence and of being annexed by the United States.

F.M.- I would now like to address a rather sensitive issue: that of freedom of expression and thought.

The Cuban regime is regularly attacked for its repressive policy with regard to...

F.C.- I can guess what you were going to say. First, I wonder if it is fair to discuss freedom of expression and thought in a region where the immense majority of the people are either totally or functionally illiterate; it sounds like a cruel joke, but it is worse. Many people in the world not only lack freedom of thought but also the capacity to think, because it has been destroyed. Billions of human beings, including a large percentage of those living in developed societies, are told what brand of soda they should drink, what cigarettes they should smoke, what clothes and shoes they should wear, what they should eat and what brand of food they should buy. Their political ideas are supplied in the same way.

Every year, a trillion dollars is spent on advertising. This rain pours on the helpless masses that are totally deprived of the necessary elements of judgement to formulate an opinion and the knowledge required meditating and discerning. This has never happened before in the history of humanity. Primitive humans enjoyed greater freedom of thought. José Martí said, "To be educated in order to be free." We would have to add a dictum: freedom is impossible without culture. Education and culture are what the Revolution has most abundantly offered to our people, much more so than in a large number of the developed countries.

Living in a consumer society does not necessarily make people educated. It is amazing, sometimes, how their knowledge can be superficial and simplistic Cuba has raised the average educational level of its people to ninth grade, and this is just the beginning. In ten years, their average cultural level will be that of a university graduate; and that will be comprehensive not simplistic knowledge. All of the necessary conditions have been created. No one can prevent our people from achieving the goal of being the most cultivated, in addition to having a profound political culture that is neither dogmatic nor sectarian; a political culture that is severely lacking in many of the world's wealthiest nations. We will place at the service of this lofty goal the great technologies created by humankind, while avoiding commercial advertising.

It would perhaps be better to wait a while before talking about true freedom of expression and thought because that can never be reconciled with a brutal economic and social capitalist system that fails to respect culture, solidarity and ethics.

F.M.- How does the Cuban State plan to contribute to this demand?

F.C.- I have partly answered that question already. As to the concrete steps we have been taking, I would like to address the matter in greater depth some other time.

F.M.- For several years now, we have seen an embryo of opposition being born on the island; that is, dissident groups are beginning to organize. This being the case, is it not perhaps time for the regime to open up to political pluralism?

F.C.- The true opposition emerged when the most profound social revolution was made in the continent amidst the Cold War and only 90 miles from the United States, which has organized and directed it for over 40 years.

The Revolution did away with centuries of privilege and affected the interests of the wealthiest and most influential sectors of Cuban society; it also affected the large agricultural, mining, industrial, commercial and service companies that the United States had established in Cuba. Our country has been the target of dirty warfare, mercenary invasions and threats of direct military attacks. We were also on the brink of a nuclear war.

The leader of that enormous counterrevolutionary activity and the economic, political and ideological war that followed was and continues to be the government of the United States of America. The rest is pure fiction, artificially created and always well financed by that superpower, its allies and its lackeys. It is all wrapped up in lies and slander, which constitute the backbone of a system devoid of ideas and

ethics in confronting a Revolution that has already faced, endured and passed the hardest tests, and a united, combative and politically stronger people.

There will be no such opening. We do not see why we should cooperate with the American strategy.

F.M.- The majority of your ministers had not been born when the armed Revolution triumphed.

F.C.- That shows that they are young and that the Revolution will be around for a while.

F.M.- What are the dreams of the Cuban people today?

F.C.- I think there are 11 million dreams.

F.M.- In what way are they different from the dreams of the previous generation?

F.C.- Before, they each dreamed of their own happiness, and today, they all dream of happiness for everyone.

F.M.- Would you not like to link the people more closely to the political decision-making process?

F.C.- Do you really think that Cuba and the Revolution would exist without a maximum degree of participation by the people?

F.M.- Since the triumph of the Revolution, a tenth of the Cuban population has left the island. How do you explain this exodus?

F.C.- You mentioned figures. I am trying to recall the various migrations and it seems to me that the figures are lower, except if they include those who were born abroad. But that is not so important.

Before the Revolution, the number of visas granted to Cubans was insignificant. When the Revolution triumphed, the doors were opened wide. Of the 6000 doctors we had, they took away half, along with a number of university professors and teachers. It was a major extraction of human resources. But, we firmly withstood the blow. No one was prevented from emigrating. It was not we, but rather they who closed the doors on more than one occasion and established quotas for legal emigration.

Their worst crime has been to encourage illegal emigration with the monstrous and murderous Cuban Adjustment Act, by virtue of which any person, regardless of his/her legal background or conduct, who illegally leaves Cuba by any means and arrives in U.S. territory, is given the right to residency in that country. In this way, they have received many criminals, although not all those who do this are criminals, and many people have lost their lives. It was this stupid law, the only one of its kind in the world, created solely for Cubans, that led to the case of the kidnapped boy Elián González, who was not even six years old at the time of the misadventure in which 11 Cubans lost their lives, his mother included.

If the same privileges had been extended to Mexico and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean throughout almost 35 years, more than half of the people in the United States would be Latin American and Caribbean. Mexico and the United States would not be separated today by a wall much higher than that in Berlin where more would-be- emigrants perish every year than those who died in all the years that the other wall existed. Let that privilege be offered in Europe to the people living North and South of the Sahara, and let's see how many emigrate.

It should be said that we have never prohibited emigration from Cuba to the United States, and that 90% of those who have emigrated have done so for economic reasons.

F.M.- The case of little Elián has inflamed the passions of the Cuban exile community in Miami. What is

your opinion of Cuban dissidents, both within the island and in Florida?

F.C.- I do not see the difference between what you call external and internal dissidents. They are exactly the same thing. They both have the same origin and the same leadership. Both are instruments of the U.S. policy against Cuba, both are pro-imperialist, anti-socialist and in favor of annexation. Those who were promoted as leaders of the so-called Cuban-American National Foundation –an abomination that emerged from the so-called Santa Fe Document, the Republican Party's 1980 political platform with regard to Cuba– were almost without exception former CIA members or the children of well-known war criminals who had escaped to the United States when the Revolution triumphed.

The list of crimes and misdeeds they committed against Cuba is endless, first as individuals recruited during at the time of the Bay of Pigs mercenary invasion, and later as members of the aforementioned Cuban-American mob. One of the goals of Reagan and his team was to have a political surrogate that, supposedly in the name of Cuban representatives, would put forward pieces of legislation or measures related to the blockade and the economic warfare against our homeland. They were granted contracts and privileged economic concessions. They trafficked in everything, including drugs, and amassed huge fortunes. But, one of their most important missions was the inception of a lobby to promote and sponsor allies from the extreme right and the most reactionary people from either of the two parties in Congress in the aggressive policy towards Cuba.

Their arsenal of actions against Cuba included supporting apparently independent terrorist groups to carry out various acts of sabotage against the economy, political crimes, the introduction of pests and biological warfare. They ended up organizing their own military apparatus and concocting countless plots to assassinate me whenever I traveled abroad. It was a genuine human hunt, with the full knowledge and tolerance of the U.S. authorities. With the abundant resources available to them, they handed out campaign funds to dozens of lawmakers from both parties, both over and under the table. They managed to put up legislators from their own group and helped to elect others. Official support was unqualified.

It is repugnant to think of everything they have done against our homeland. Their most recent crime was the kidnapping of a child who had not even turned six yet, whom they stole from his legitimate family. As the owners of Florida, they felt they had the right to defy the laws and orders of the federal government itself. They ended up trampling and burning U.S. flags. The enormously stupid misdeed committed in the case of this Cuban boy has been their political Waterloo. It will be very difficult for them to pick up the scattered pieces of the considerable power and political influence they had achieved and to put together something new that will serve them in any way.

The other arm of the American counterrevolutionary strategy is as morally and politically destroyed as they are, that is, the small groupings they have been promoting over the years to create an internal front against the solid and unshakable unity and strength of the Revolution. They spur these groups on with funds that arrive by a wide range of means, and support them with all the media within their reach. These groups promote their counterrevolutionary and slanderous campaigns through the subversive radio stations broadcasting out of the United States and the Foundation-controlled press. They work in close alliance with the Cuban-American mob and are directly coordinated by the staff of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, by Czech and Polish diplomats and by other officials from the embassies of several countries allied with or subordinated to the United States.

Their essential mission is to obstruct Cuba's diplomatic and economic relations, and to use their provocation to supply publicity material for propaganda and slanderous campaigns aimed at isolating Cuba. In these glorious and heroic years of double blockade and special period, when the survival of our homeland was at stake, the feats achieved by our people will sink them deep down into the swamp of their infamy, and into what is absolutely the most certain and worthy fate for their shameful role: oblivion.

F.M.- How did you receive the news of Elián's liberation by federal agents on April 22?

F.C.- I was almost shocked that they had finally decided to do it although it was something that needed to be done urgently. The child's life was in great danger. The reunion with his father, his little brother, his stepmother and a number of his little schoolmates has led to a spectacular change in the boy's spirits and health. He is making rapid progress in his studies, and despite the months he spent captive, he will be able to successfully complete the school year. The fundamental question now is when will he finally return to Cuba. I do not think there is any legal, moral or political grounds to keep him in the United States. The American people, almost unanimously, have shown their support for his reunion with his father and his return to Cuba. It is a gesture for which we will always be grateful.

F.M.- How did you react to the condemnation of Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission on April 18, 2000, the result of an initiative of the Czech Republic and Poland? You were reproached for violently repressing political dissidents and religious groups...

F.C.- Regarding the vote in Geneva, it was obviously the case of a new and hypocritical act of U.S. hostility and aggression against Cuba, with the active complicity governments from a few former socialist countries willing to play the American dirty game and the support of their European accomplices which vote as a bloc in Geneva alongside their powerful ally and boss of the NATO mob.

We did not hesitate to expose this infamous maneuver. Our people condemned it unanimously and we formulated resounding denunciations against those involved in the plot, many of which they have not been able to respond. The reactions will be increasingly tougher, and the battle against Cuba increasingly difficult.

F.M.- Pope John Paul II visited Havana in January of 1998. Did he convince you?

F.C.- I really do not recall the Pope trying to convince me of anything. We received him with the hospitality and respect deserved by such an outstanding personality, and one with special talent and charisma. We both spoke in public upon his arrival and departure, and we both put forward our ideas with respect and dignity. I was brief: I spoke for fourteen minutes when welcoming him and five minutes when bidding him farewell.

We handed the country over to him. We provided him with the most historic public squares, which were chosen by the organizers of the visit. Our television networks were available to him. We provided the transportation requested for mobilizations, using all of the means available in our blockaded country. We invited our Party members, the Young Communist League and the mass organizations to attend the masses, under strict instructions to listen respectfully to everything he had to say, with no placards, slogans, or revolutionary shouts. One hundred and ten foreign television networks and five thousand journalists received permission to report the visit throughout the world. There was not a single soldier on the streets, nor a single armed police officer. Nothing like this had ever happened anywhere else in the world.

At the end, the organizers of the Pope's travels stated that it was the best-organized visit he had ever made. Not a single traffic accident occurred. I think that he took away a good impression of our country; at the same time, he made a good impression on Cuba. I had the opportunity to admire his working capacity and his dedication to strictly comply with the grueling itinerary worked out by his staff. The only ones faced with a fiasco were those individuals abroad –and there were quite a few of them– who thought that the Revolution would fall with the mere presence of the Pope, like the walls of Jericho. In the end, both the Revolution and the Pope emerged very much aware of their own strengths.

F.M.- No one is immortal, neither Heads of State nor common men and women. Do you not think that it would be wise to prepare a successor, even if it is only to spare the Cuban people the trauma of a chaotic transition?

F.C.- I am very much aware that man is mortal but I have never worried about that. In fact, that has

been a key factor in my life. When my rebellious nature led me to the dangerous calling of a revolutionary fighter, something that no one forced me into, I also knew that there was very little chance that I could survive for long. I was not a Head of State but a very common man. I did not inherit a position, nor am I a king, therefore, I do not need to prepare a successor. In any case, it would never be to prevent the trauma of a chaotic transition. There will be no trauma, nor will there be a need for any kind of transition.

The transition from one social system to another has been taking place for over 40 years. This is not about replacing one man with another.

When a genuine Revolution has been consolidated and when ideas and consciousness have begun to bear fruit no man is indispensable, no matter how important his personal contribution may have been. There is no cult of personality in Cuba. You will never see official photographs, nor streets or parks or schools named after living leaders. The responsibilities are very well shared and the work is distributed among many. A large number of young and already experienced people, together with a smaller group of old revolutionaries, with whom they closely identify, will be the ones who keep the country going. It cannot be overlooked that there is a party here with great prestige and moral authority. So what is there to worry about?

F.M.- What you are saying is perfectly true. However, precisely by not putting into place right now the individuals and structures, that is, the relief force that can take over when the time comes, do you not think that you are increasing the risk that these social achievements will be questioned?

F.C.- The relief force as you have called it is not only already prepared but it has also been in place and working for quite some time.

F.M.- It is your privilege to be a living myth. Will you continue to be a myth after you pass away?

F.C.- I am not a myth. The successive U.S. administrations have turned me into what you call a myth and if I have been a living myth, it is also thanks to their failure in the countless attempts to cut my life short. But, of course, I will continue to be one after I am dead. Would it really be possible to dismiss the merit of having struggled for so many years against such a powerful empire?

F.M.- Fidel Castro, always the conspirator. Does this image belong to an obsolete past?

F.C.- On the contrary, it has become such a significant habit of mine that I do not even talk to myself about the most important secret strategies in my revolutionary struggle. I prefer to talk about them on television.

F.M.- Why do you live by night? When do you prepare your speeches?

F.C.- I live and almost always work at all hours, day and night. Can you really afford to waste time once you are over 70? As for my speeches, I have come to the conclusion, a bit late perhaps, that speeches ought to be short.

Lugar:

Havana

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CUBA WILL NEITHER NEGOTIATE NOR SELL OUT ITS REVOLUTION WHICH HAS COST THE BLO

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