

The Bolivarian Revolution and the Antilles

I was fond of History, as much as almost any other kid. And I also liked wars, a sort of culture that society used to sow among boys. All the toys we were given were toy guns.

Being a child I was sent to a city where no one ever took me to the movies. Television did not exist then, and in the house where I lived there was no radio. Imagination was my only resort.

At my first school as a boarding student I read in wonderment about the Flood and Noah's Ark. Afterwards I realized that this was perhaps a vestige of the last climate change in the history of our species that humanity preserved. Very likely this was the end of the last glacial period, which supposedly took place thousands of years ago.

As was to be expected, further on I eagerly read the history of Alexander, Cesar, Hannibal, Bonaparte and, of course, every other book that fell into my hands about Maceo, Gomez, Agramonte and other great soldiers who fought for our independence. I was not cultured enough to understand what was that which underlay history.

Later on I focused on Marti. As a matter of fact, it is to him that I owe my patriotic feelings and the profound belief that "Homeland is humanity." The audacity, beauty, courage and ethics of his ideas helped me to become what I think I am: a revolutionary.

If you don't share Marti's ideas, you can not share Bolivar's. If you don't share Marti's and Bolivar's ideas, you can not be a Marxist. And if you don't share Marti's and Bolivar's ideas and you are not a Marxist, you can not be an anti-imperialist. In our times it was impossible to conceive a Revolution in Cuba without sharing Marti's and Bolivar's ideas, being a Marxist and an anti-imperialist.

Hardly two centuries ago, in the 1820s, Bolivar had intended to send an expedition commanded by Sucre to liberate Cuba, which so badly needed it, for it was a Spanish colony devoted only to the production of sugar and coffee, where 300 000 slaves worked for their white masters.

After Cuba's independence attempts failed, the country was turned into a neo-colony. The full dignity of man could never be achieved without a Revolution that could put an end to the exploitation of man by man.

"I want the first law of our Republic to be Cubans' cult to the full dignity of man."

Marti's ideas inspired the courage and beliefs that made our Movement to attack the Moncada military garrison, an action that would have never even crossed our minds hadn't we shared the ideas of other great thinkers such as Marx and Lenin, which made us realize and understand the very different realities of the new times we were living in.

For centuries, progress and development served to justify the hateful latifundia system and slave labor that were preceded by the extermination of the aboriginal inhabitants of these islands.

Marti said something wonderful about Bolivar, which was worthy of his glorious life:

"...what he did not do, still remains undone today: because Bolivar still has things to do in the Americas."

“...tell me, Venezuela, how I could best serve you, for in me you have a son.”

In Venezuela, the colonial power -as other colonial powers did in the Antilles- planted sugar cane, coffee, cocoa and also brought in African men and women to work as slaves. The heroic resistance put up by its indigenous people, helped by Nature and the extension of the Venezuelan territory, forbid the annihilation of the aboriginal communities.

Except for one part to the North of the hemisphere, the huge territory of Our America was in the hands of two kings of the Iberian Peninsula.

We can categorically assert that, for centuries, our countries and the fruits of their peoples' labor have been plundered - and continue to be so- by the big transnationals and the oligarchies to their service.

Through the 19th and the 20th centuries, that is, during almost 200 years after the formal independence of Ibero-America, nothing has essentially changed. After the thirteen British colonies rebelled, the United States expanded across the West and the South. It bought Louisiana and Florida, robbed Mexico of more than half its territory, intervened in Central America and took control of the zone where the future Panama Canal was to be built, which would connect the big oceans that lay to the East and the West of the continent through the area where Bolivar intended to found the capital of the biggest republic of all, the one resulting from the independence of the American nations.

Back in those times, oil and ethanol were not marketed in the world; the WTO did not exist either. Sugar cane, cotton and corn were grown with slave work. The machines were still to be invented. Industrialization pushed forward with the use of coal.

Wars propelled civilization, and civilization propelled wars. The latter changed in nature and became all the more terrible. Finally they turned into world conflicts.

We were at last a civilized world. As a matter of principle, we even believe we are.

But we do not know what to do with the civilization that we achieved. Human beings have equipped themselves with nuclear weapons of unconceivable accuracy and annihilating power, while taking a shameful step back from a moral and political point of view. Socially and politically we are more underdeveloped than ever. Robots are replacing soldiers; media are replacing educators and governments start to be overtaken by events without knowing what to do. The desperation that prevails among many international political leaders is an evidence of their powerlessness to solve the many problems that pile up in their working offices and at the ever more frequent international meetings.

Under such circumstances, an unprecedented catastrophe has taken place in Haiti, while at the opposite side of the planet three wars and an arms race continue to evolve in the midst of the economic crisis and ever-growing conflicts, which absorb more than 2.5 per cent of the world's GDP, a share that will allow all Third World countries to develop in a short period of time and perhaps avoid the climate change, by devoting the economic and scientific resources indispensable to meet that goal.

The credibility of the world's community has just been dealt a hard blow at Copenhagen, and our species is not showing its ability to survive.

Haiti's tragedy makes me address this point of view, based on what Venezuela has done for all Caribbean nations. While in Montreal the big financial institutions are hesitant about what should be done in Haiti, Venezuela has not hesitated for a second to condone Haiti's economic debt amounting to 167 million dollars.

For almost a century, the biggest transnationals extracted and exported the Venezuelan oil at ludicrous prices. For decades Venezuela was the world's biggest oil exporting country.

It is well known that when the United States spent hundreds of billions of dollars in its genocidal war against Vietnam, which killed and maimed millions in that heroic nation, it also unilaterally cancelled the Bretton-Woods agreement and suspended the gold standard, as was stated under such agreement, thus burdening the world's economy with the cost of that dirty war. The US currency devalued and the Caribbean countries' hard currency revenues were not enough to pay for the oil. Their economies were based on tourism and the export of sugar, coffee, cocoa and other agricultural products. A dumbfounding blow was lingering upon the Caribbean States economies, except for two of them which were energy exporters.

Other developed countries eliminated tariff preferences for Caribbean agricultural export products, such as banana. Venezuela had an unprecedented gesture: it guaranteed a reliable oil supply and special payment facilities for most of these countries.

However, no one ever bothered about the fate of those peoples. Hadn't it been for the Bolivarian Republic, a terrible crisis would have hit the independent Caribbean States, with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. In the case of Cuba, after the collapse of the USSR, the Bolivarian government promoted an extraordinary growth in trade between the two countries, including the trade in goods and services, which enabled us to struggle on through one of the toughest periods of our glorious revolutionary history.

The US best ally -and also the most abject and vile people's enemy- was the fake and pretender Romulo Betancourt, who was Venezuela's president-elect at the time when the Revolution triumphed in Cuba in 1959.

He was the main accomplice to the pirate attacks, terrorist actions, aggressions and economic blockade against our homeland.

The Bolivarian Revolution finally broke out when our America needed it the most.

After being invited to travel to Caracas by Hugo Chavez, the ALBA members committed to offer maximum support to the Haitian people at the saddest moment in the history of that legendary nation which carried out the first victorious social Revolution in the history of the world. That was the time when hundreds of thousands of Africans rebelled and created a Republic in Haiti, thousands of miles away from their home countries, and carried out one of the most glorious revolutionary actions in this hemisphere. In Haiti there is a mix of Black, Indian and White blood. The Republic was born from the ideas of equity, justice and freedom for all human beings.

Ten years ago, when tens of thousands of lives were lost in the Caribbean and Central America as a result of the tragedy caused by hurricane Mitch, in Cuba the ELAM was founded to train the Latin American and Caribbean physicians who would some day be able to save millions of lives. But first and foremost they were to become an example in the noble exercise of the medical profession. Tens of Venezuelan and other Latin American youths graduated from ELAM will be working hand in hand with Cubans in Haiti. From everywhere in the continent we have received news about many comrades who studied at ELAM, who have expressed their willingness to cooperate with them in the noble task of saving the lives of children, women, men, youths and senior citizens.

There will be hundreds of field hospitals, rehabilitation centers and hospitals, where more than one thousand doctors and students of the last years of the specialty of Medicine from Haiti, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Brazil, Chile and other sister nations will be offering their services. We already have the honor of being able to count on a group of American doctors who also studied at ELAM. We are ready to cooperate with those countries and institutions that may be willing to take part in these efforts to offer medical services in Haiti.

Venezuela has already donated tents, medical equipment, medicines and foodstuffs. The Haitian

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government has offered its full cooperation and support to this efforts aimed at offering health care at no cost to as many Haitians as possible. This will be a comfort to everybody in the midst of the biggest tragedy that has ever occurred in our hemisphere.

Fidel Castro Ruz
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