

Obama and the Blockade

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Yesterday I referred to what was funny about the “Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain”.

Today I could refer to what is tragic about it. I hope our friends do not take any offence in this. There were some differences between the draft that we received, which was going to be submitted by the hosts of the Summit, and the document that was finally published. In all that last-minute haste, there was hardly any time for anything. Some items had been discussed at long meetings held some weeks previous to the Summit. At the very last moment, proposals such as the one submitted by Bolivia, complicated even more the whole picture. The Bolivian proposal was included as a note in the document. It stated that Bolivia considered that the implementation of policies and cooperation schemes aimed at expanding the use of bio-fuels in the western hemisphere could affect and have an impact on the availability of foodstuffs, the increase of food prices, deforestation, the displacement of populations as a result of the land demand, and that consequently this could make the food crisis to be even worse, which will directly affect low income persons and, most of all, the poorest economies among developing countries. The note added that the Bolivian government, while recognizing the need to look for and resort to environmentally friendly alternative sources of energy, such as the geothermal, solar, and eolic sources of energy, and to small and medium size hydro-power generators, it advocates for an alternative approach, based on the possibility of living well and in harmony with nature, in order to develop public policies aimed at the promotion of safe alternative energies that could ensure the preservation of the planet, our ‘mother land’.

When analyzing this note submitted by Bolivia please bear in mind that the United States and Brazil are the two biggest producers of bio-fuels in the world, something that is opposed by an increasing number of persons in the planet, whose resistance has been growing since the dark days of George Bush.

Obama’s advisors published in the Internet their version -in English- of the interview the US president granted to some journalists in Port of Spain. At one point, he asserted that there was something he found interesting -an added that he had known of it in a more abstract way but that he found it interesting in more specific terms- which was listening to these leaders who, when speaking about Cuba, did so referring specifically to the thousands of doctors Cuba is disseminating throughout the region, and finding how much these countries depended on them. He said this reminded them in the US of the fact that if their only interaction with many of these countries was the war on drugs; that if their only interaction was of a military character, then it was possible that they would not be developing connections that, with time, could enhance their influence with a positive effect when they may find it necessary to advance policies of their interest in the region.

He said he thought that was the reason why it was so important -for the sake of their interaction, not only here in this hemisphere, but in the whole world- to recognize that their military power was just part of their power, and that they have to resort to diplomacy and their aid to development in a more intelligent way, so that peoples could see concrete and practical improvements in the life of ordinary citizens, based on the foreign policy of the United States.

Jake, one of the journalists, said thanks to the President and added that in Port of Spain the President had listened to many Latin American leaders who want the US to lift the embargo against Cuba. The journalist reminded the President he had said that was an important influence that should not be eliminated. But he added that in 2004 the President did support the lifting of the embargo. He reminded the President he had said that the embargo had not managed to raise the standards of living, that it had squeezed the innocent, and that it was high time for the US to recognize that that particular policy had failed. The journalist wondered what made the President change his opinion with regards to the embargo.

The President responded that the year 2004 seemed to be thousands of years ago, and wondered what he himself was doing in 2004.

The journalist answered that back then he was running for the Senate. The President added that the fact that Raul Castro had said his government was ready to talk with the US government not only about the lifting of the embargo but also about other issues, namely, human rights and political prisoners, was a signal of progress. He said there were some things the Cuban government could do. He added that Cuba could release the political prisoners, reduce the surcharge imposed on remittances, which will correspond with the policies that they have applied, whereby Cuban-American families are allowed to send remittances. He said that it so happened that Cuba applies a very high surcharge. He said that Cuba is exacting significant profits. He added that this would be an example of cooperation where both governments would be working to help the Cuban family and improve the living standards in Cuba.

There is no doubt that the President misinterpreted Raul's statements.

When the President of Cuba said he was ready to discuss any topic with the US President, he meant he was not afraid of addressing any issue. That shows his courage and confidence on the principles of the Revolution. No one should feel astonished that Raul spoke about pardoning those who were convicted on March, 2003, and about sending them all to the United States, should that country be willing to release the Five Cuban Anti-Terrorism Heroes. The convicts, as was already the case with the Bay of Pig's mercenaries, are at the service of a foreign power that threatens and blockades our homeland.

Besides, the assertion that Cuba imposes a very high surcharge and obtains significant profits is an attempt by the President's advisors to cause trouble and division among Cubans. Every country charges a certain amount for all hard currency transfers. If those are made in dollars, all the more reason we have to do it, because that is the currency of the country that blockades us. Not all Cubans have relatives abroad that could send them remittances. Redistributing a relatively small part of them to benefit those more in need of food, medicines and other goods is absolutely fair. Our homeland does not have the privilege of converting the money minted by the State into hard currency -something the Chinese very often call "junk money"- as I have explained on several occasions, which has

been one of the causes of the present economic crisis. With what money the US is bailing out its banks and multinationals, while plunging future generations of Americans into indebtedness? Would Obama be ready to discuss those issues?

Daniel Ortega stated it very clearly when he remembered the first conversation he had with Carter, which today I will once more repeat:

“I had the opportunity to meet with President Carter, and when he told me that now, after the Somozas’ tyranny had been ousted, and the Nicaraguan people had defeated the Somozas’ tyranny, it was high time ‘for Nicaragua to change’, I said: ‘No, Nicaragua does not need to change; you are the ones that need to change. Nicaragua has never invaded the United States. Nicaragua has never mined the US ports. Nicaragua has never launched a single stone against the American nation. Nicaragua has not imposed any government on the United States. You are the ones that need to change, not the Nicaraguans.’ ”

At the press conference, as well as in the final meetings of the Summit, Obama looked conceited. Such attitude by the US President was consistent with the abject positions adopted by some Latin American leaders. Some days ago I said that whatever was said and done at the Summit will be known anyway.

When the US President said, in answering to Jake, that thousands of years had elapsed since 2004 until the present, he was superficial. Should we wait for so many years before his blockade is lifted? He did not invent it, but he embraced it just as much as the previous ten US presidents did. Should he continue down that same path, we could predict he would face a sure fiasco, just as all his predecessor did. That is not the dream entertained by Martin Luther King, whose role in the struggle for human rights will ever more illuminate the American people’s path.

We are living in a new era. Changes are unavoidable. Leaders just pass through; peoples prevail. There would be no need to wait for thousands of years to pass by; only eight years will be enough so that a new US President –who will no doubt be less intelligent, promising and admired in the world than Barack Obama- riding on a better armored car, or on a more modern helicopter, or on a more sophisticated plane, occupies that inglorious position.

Tomorrow we shall have more news about the Summit.

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