



An objective possibility exists to bring together everything which opposes real capitalism

NÉSTOR KOHAN AND LUCIANO ÁLZAGA :: 16/05/2006

Interview with President of Cuban Parliament Ricardo Alarcón

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Luciano Álzaga: Several cases have come to the fore in the last few months about clandestine transfers of prisoners of the U.S. crusade on "terrorism" across some European nations, which denied knowledge of these facts, to be tortured in third countries or in secret prisons. If U.S. intelligence and other repressive forces undertake these covert flights to apply torture where such harassment is legal and torture is condoned, as if they respect international judicial order in some way, why not do it right in a CIA base as in the past? Does this mixture of secret flights, torture and judicial "legalism" hint at a change of doctrine in the international strategy of imperial domination? Or does it point to a change of status in Guantánamo or to the fact that torture no longer exists in that U.S. base?

Ricardo Alarcón: I think there are some catches here. First, the West is presented as virginal when it comes to the issue of torture. That's not true!. Torture has been ordinarily and systematically inflicted in the United States. An interesting article by Naomi Klein was published in The Nation which states something similar to what I'm going to tell you now. What's new about Bush? What is he adding to the picture now? Well, that he openly acknowledges torture and turns it into a doctrine, which most likely upset many within the Establishment. These things have always been done, but now it seems they have to assemble a clandestine system to take those prisoners to "bad" countries which either practice torture or lend themselves to it. There's a catch behind all this, though, to give the impression that the U.S. tortures no one. If they have cases like the videotaped beating of African American Rodney King, then what won't they do to a black person in private after arresting him with no TV cameras nearby? Similar things recently happened in New Orleans. If that's how they treat a black citizen in front of a camera, who's going to make me believe that black people in prison or at police stations are treated in keeping with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? It's the same society, the same country!.

Bear in mind that in one of his State of the Union speeches, where Bush takes stock of the war on "terrorism" and says that several thousand terrorists have been captured, he added this phrase: "Many others have met a different fate. They are no longer a problem for the United States and our friends and allies". I've read no complaints about these words by European politicians, nor have I read any editorial in Europe. Only in The New Yorker did I find something: an editorial stating such language had not been used in the world since Hitler's time. The U.S. president was acknowledging the practice of extra-judicial executions. He did it before the U.S. Congress, and he received an ovation, not a protest.

All of a sudden, this whole thing about clandestine flights and prisons comes about and it

really makes you wonder. Let's take it step by step: first, that the European countries knew nothing. Colin Powell, who knows what he's talking about, already answered to that by saying the Europeans were hypocrites and knew only too well what was going on. As to why they don't do it in a CIA base as usual, I believe they still do. Maybe now they are allowed more leeway, since many people think that they instead send [those prisoners] to other countries where, like you say here...

Néstor Kohan: ...exerting pressure is legal or torture is accepted...

R.A: Exerting pressure is not legal in the U.S., nor is torture accepted, but it is inflicted. Even mistreatment is commonplace. I lived there for a long time, and no one ever thinks of raising their voice to a police officer, for anyone can be shoved or clubbed. In her article, Naomi recovers a very important thing: when Bush first referred to this topic he was in Panama City, of all places, closer than any other to the School of the Americas where for many years Latin American torturers were trained. And who trained them? Yankee officers. Every year American pacifists go there to demand the closing of that School, which now has a different name, but it's the same thing.

N.K: Have the French colonialist military in Algeria been the Yankees' torture instructors?

R.A: Yes, even if the U.S. military also have their own record of massacres. Look what they did to the Indians. As Susan Sontag noted 40 years ago in an outstanding essay, the United States is a nation whose foundations and origins lie in genocide. It is a profoundly racist society. Bush has the satisfaction of giving his speech on torture a stone's throw away from the school of torturers, and Klein remarks that no newspaper linked one thing to the other, despite their being offered a likely comment as a gift. The U.S. is not so "innocent" in this regard, so it's not so easy to explain why they do it.

L.A: They are implementing missing people policies like back in the 1970s. Those won't be causing trouble anymore...

R.A: That's the other important thing. The U.S. is doing it, but there comes a senator saying that it has to be banned, that it's not a systematic practice but an aberration fueled by the fight on terror that must be corrected. What's the price to be paid? All torture victims from previous years, the victims of Plan Condor, will forever be condemned to oblivion, as part of something that "never was"... Care must be taken to deal with this barbaric Bush, lest we overlook the fact that others before him did the same thing. In those countries where dictators kept secret prisons torture was practiced under U.S. advice and guidance, and it took place under neoconservative, liberal democratic, moderate democratic, conservative republican and moderate republican governments. They have been doing it forever.

I don't think there's any change of doctrine in international strategy, far from it. Bush can be anything, but he's got brilliant advisors by his side. Perhaps they want to justify everything by talking about the terrible blow U.S. society suffered on September 11, etc. etc., and make us believe it won't happen again. Yet, that's also like saying it never happened before. "That's not the American way", said a legislator, "we don't act that way". That's not true! The U.S. has always behaved like that, except that they never dared to

admit it, as Bush did to the whole Congress.

L.A: But the fact that they are using European countries...

R.A: That's another thing.

N.K: They even mention Eastern countries...

R.A: Those seem to have been their final destination. They went by western countries which now say to know nothing, but [Colin] Powell already answered to that: "they are hypocrites". Everything was very well explained to them. The prisoners are said to have ended up in Eastern Europe, and I've heard about a list of countries.

L.A: Egypt is one of those destinations.

R.A: Egypt was mentioned, it's true. Still, what sin has the U.S. committed? Having delivered those prisoners to some gentlemen capable of torturing, something the U.S. is not supposed to do. But there's Abu Ghraib and there's Guantánamo, just to mention the latest examples. They took Latin Americans to the U.S. to teach them how to torture. There's the famous torture manual they used during the dirty war in Central America, where accurate descriptions are made of exactly the same tortures they are practicing now in Iraq. It's obvious these torturers attended that course.

The case of Guantánamo base is more complicated, because today it's used in a different way, though its status remains unchanged.

N.K: When was Guantánamo turned into a torture camp?

R.A: I think it was now with the war in Iraq. Sometimes they welcomed Cuban and Haitian émigrés there, but I've heard nothing about those people having been tortured. That base was supposed to be used as a naval station during past Cuban governments. After the Revolution, barring a number of provocations that at times became very serious events where some companeros were killed, the purpose of the base was to preserve a symbol of U.S. power and show that they remained in Cuba. Then they started using it to shelter migrants, something very dangerous in Cuba's case, since some people who wanted to leave for the U.S. tried to get into the base instead of trying their luck at sea. And we're talking about a military facility surrounded by other military facilities belonging to two armies from two hostile countries.

From an operational standpoint, in Guantánamo we have managed to attain a rather civilized relationship between both military commands; it's been a long time since an incident took place. Some military commanders were even annoyed when they started using the premises as a depot for emigrants, mainly after the stampede of Haitian refugees following the demise of Duvalier, Jr. Furthermore, it seems they have been busy trafficking with people. As a rule, they take back to Cuba anyone intercepted at sea, although those who set foot on U.S. soil are always allowed to stay there. Regardless, they decided to send to Guantánamo certain people they didn't know what to do with, and thus the base became another thing, a migratory center. To top it all off, they started sending there all the

prisoners they had arrested in Afghanistan.

What's the rationale for all this? It's a territory under their control that is no part of the United States. It has the worst of both worlds. They recognize the judicial principle herein: it's Cuban territory but not one over which Cuba exercises its sovereignty, and therefore those prisoners have no rights at all.

L.A: There's something Machiavellian about using Guantánamo to shut away prisoners. The U.S. holds 700 big bases worldwide, yet they put them there as if to mock the Cubans. The headlines say "Torture in Cuba", even if further on the article makes it clear that it's referring to Guantánamo base.

R.A: Yes, but there are some differences. There are American bases in Spain, Germany, and so on, and I guess those countries have not given up their sovereignty over the territories occupied by such bases, so at least on paper the U.S. must undertake to abide by the law in those nations. We're talking about bases in "friendly countries". In the case of Guantánamo, that area is in a kind of limbo from a legal point of view, which suits them down to the ground to hold untried prisoners. What's evil is keeping them in that limbo where they have no rights nor have they been declared guilty or innocent, as if they were in a secret prison. In fact, they have not published any list of prisoners yet. Besides, they keep them behind a hill so that you can't even see them from the lookout on the Cuban side.

True, to some extent it can be considered an affront to Cuba, an insult. There's a funny side to it, though. Cuba is accused of violating human rights, but when Cuba proposes that an investigation be made in the other part of its territory they readily admit it is indeed Cuban soil. And then the whole of Europe, the same Europe that votes for anti-Cuban resolution, does it also against the Cuban resolution on Guantánamo, written in the same language without any additional request. In other words, those inspectors Europe wants to send to inquire into human rights in Cuba could travel all over the country and would have to stop there where, as everyone knows in Europe, torture is practiced. Every tall tale and fabrication about the topic of human rights are thus unmasked.

In short, it's important to make it quite clear that this issue of torture can't be ascribed to the current U.S. regime's wickedness. Every U.S. government has done it! The current president is simply the only one who had the nerve to announce the news to all and sundry. No American citizen would have ever accepted the Patriot Act or to be openly spied on, which are commonplace nowadays.

N.K: How to approach the fact that the military-industrial complex and the most reactionary circles within the G.O.P. chose Condoleezza Rice, a woman who is also a member of the black community, to defend torture at international level, in her capacity as Secretary of State, and on behalf of her country's "national security"? Even if such a decision may stem from hegemonic speech and multiculturalism, wouldn't it be an attempt to co-opt and counteract any possible internal challenge posed to the power by criticism coming from American social movements like those of women and the African Americans?

R.A: The image issue has worked better through Powell. He's also a black person, but a

high-ranking army officer, so they depict him mainly as "reasonable". He's the most levelheaded person in Bush's government. Condoleezza is a consistent right-winger. She's not in the least bit a black woman, except for her skin color. By and large, her mindset is different from that of the vast majority of African Americans. Suffice it to remember when she was buying shoes in one of those shops along Fifth Avenue, where it's hard to see a black person even among the employees, and a woman, probably white, insulted her. It was because the Secretary of State, who is precisely the only black member in the office, was increasing her collection of shoes while "the niggers", the humblest popular sector, were coping with horror in New Orleans. People see her as a very conservative person who represents right-wing America's interests, as black as she is.

Anyway, a very clear racial line stands out in the opinion polls: 80% or 90% of African Americans are against Bush. I don't see how they can use Rice to confound feminist or African American movements. Her speech looks like that of white conservatives. There's a difference in the case of Colin Powell, who has risen in an institution where black people are not rare, probably by saying "yes" very often as the easiest way for a black person to advance. Yet, he never shied away from his Jamaican extraction. Rice had an academic education and ranks among the smartest members in Bush's team, but an all-out right-winger. When faced with [hurricane] Katrina she reacted as a white, cold-hearted millionaire.

L.A: After the disgraceful impact of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and its surroundings, many people have compared those effects with the usual results in Cuba in the aftermath of a hurricane, as well as the preparations there before such events. Moreover, some analysts remarked there was no such thing as the famed "apathy" and "incompetence" of Bush's government but rather a thought-out plan to further promote neoliberalism and thus make it quite clear that it's not for the state to take care of low-income people, not even in the case of a natural disaster. What do you think about it?

R.A: The Bush administration's attitude is a logical outcome of today's neoliberalism. As far as I'm concerned, Bush's advice is very enlightening: "pray and leave". Many go so far as to really believe that you should just get in your car, fill the tank and drive away. However, there must be tens of thousands of people in that city who have never had a car. The idea that everyone in America owns a car as we see in movies is in many places a far cry from reality. The state is increasingly a non-participant body devoid of any social responsibility. I guess there's also the issue of racism: you have to be a racist through and through to react as they did in New Orleans. The Speaker of the House voiced his opposition to rebuilding the city... he's white, so he couldn't care less.

This has to do as well with how much they respect the environment, what they do to swamps and how they use their resources regarding the dams. And we haven't heard the last of this matter yet, for 1,000 children are still unaccounted for. What I wonder is whether it was a deliberate scam to do away with black people.

L.A: My question is not so much whether they did it to get rid of black people or rather to make it understood that it's not the state's responsibility to help the

poor. Bush not only told people to leave, he also said that the heroic southerners, through their own efforts and by the sweat of their brows, will rebuild the city. That is, it's not the state but the people themselves who have to get by on their own as best as they can.

R.A: That's where you see many contradictions in the present model. Take the insurance topic: a lot of citizens are suing the companies which are now saying it was the flood, not the hurricane, that destroyed their homes, an event not covered by the policies. And the state is backing the companies. As it happened in Europe, the welfare state is drifting away.

What's odd is that Cuba is acting as a sort of protective shield for the United States. Hurricanes land on or travel through when they are a category 4 or 5 event and then they weaken before they hit the U.S. But Cuban society is planned differently. Nobody expects a municipal, provincial or national authority to detach itself from the problem. We have a Civil Defense system that Americans don't have. The U.S. National Guard is supposed to see to these things but now it has its hands full with Iraq. Our armed forces boast two features Americans lack: first, they are designed to defend our national territory, and second, they have a popular character, that is, everybody gets involved, whereas in the U.S. they are facing outwards.

Every Cuban takes it for granted that the armed forces step in when we're faced with a natural disaster. This is to us a kind of preparation for war. For instance, the subject of evacuation. If there's a bombing, our system in Cuba allows everyone to know their destination and what to do, although each can evacuate on his/her own. Either on a block-to-block basis or at national scale, the whole society is organized to defend itself, unlike in the U.S. In a report by an American alternative media organ I saw a group of volunteers trying to rescue an elderly black man from the flood, but he was stubbornly refusing and saying, "What I want is a Cuban doctor, otherwise I'll remain here".

In its political, and even state, theory, capitalism nurtures selfishness and individualism and converts you to it. Socialism has to be the opposite. It is when a hurricane is coming that both perspectives collide. Had this happened in a wealthy neighborhood, no one can believe we would have seen a white family crying for help from a rooftop. All families we saw there were black and poor. Racism comes naturally and spontaneously to a racist person.

N.K. and L.A.: Cuba has strengthened links with a number of "progressive" Latin American governments (like Lula's, Kirchner's or Tabaré Vázquez's), in a way an understandable and positive decision since it makes it possible for Cuba to break its political isolation vis-à-vis the United States, but isn't the Cuban Revolution also running the risk of drifting apart from social movements of protest -the piqueteros in Argentina or the Sin Tierra in Brazil- for which it set a long-standing example? For instance, during the conferences held in Mar del Plata [Argentina] in early November, 2005 there were various demonstrations against both the FTAA and George Bush's visit. Nevertheless, the Cuban delegation only attended the one that had the Argentinean government's official support and stayed away from that of social movements and the piqueteros opposed to Kirchner...

R.A: I was present at two events: the Summit of the Peoples and the rally where Hugo

Chávez spoke. In both cases, there were people in favor of and against some Latin American governments. They carried pictures of presidents, and some were handing out leaflets attacking Kirchner's and Lula's governments and so forth. What impressed me was the level of civility; the march passed off peacefully, despite the presence of people opposed to the organizers and carrying big signs, but no one was pushed because of that. That's important.

Likewise, it's very common for social movements to complain about the FTAA, but let's not underestimate the fact that they stopped it right there at the conference. And it was stopped by five Latin American governments. Not by the piqueteros, the Cuban communists or the trade unionists, but five Latin American governments, any differences with them notwithstanding. Let's ask Bush what troubled him the most: what happened inside the conference or outside behind the fences. He was unable to return to his country with the victory he needed so badly at the time, a schedule to gradually implement the FTAA. It was not only Chávez; alongside him were other Latin American governments that came together for that purpose. I'm not judging the behavior and strategy of the various social movements, but we can't overlook the fact that the FTAA was brought to a halt. Kirchner's opening speech was unusual, which accounted for [Mexican president] Fox's criticism: a host is supposed to bid welcome and contribute to the success of the conference.

N.K: My question goes beyond the punctual facts of Mar del Plata. The Cuban Revolution's foreign policy in the 1960s favored links with revolutionary movements and set governments aside. Things have changed now that "progressive" governments are coming up. How can the Revolution keep its links with those governments without letting those movements down? If it only favors links with "progressive" governments, isn't it taking the risk of weakening the example that it meant for decades to those movements? Remember that in practice these social movements of protest do not always agree with their governments...

R.A: I think we can avoid that risk. We have tried to remain respectful to everyone. Some governments frankly deserve respect, as does some movements' autonomy. Obviously, the focal point of revolutions today and the road to progress in Latin America is not guerilla warfare nor armed struggle. And probably some companeros still defend that concept, which we respect and never frown at. But there's another thing: in the 1960s, the Mexican government was the only one we would distinguish from the rest in our speech, where we portrayed it as a conservative government closely tied to the U.S., even if we had to acknowledge that they were the only ones who refused to yield to the policy of breaking up with Cuba.

N.K: That's precisely a very good example, for this dilemma reemerged in other historical circumstances in governments seemingly sympathetic to Cuba, and now to Venezuela too, while inwardly they are like the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional de México] used to be. Any forced analogy aside, Cuba was compelled to relate to the sole government - Mexico's - which kept its [diplomatic] links with the island. As a result, however, Mexican social movements could not be asked or advised to respect, support or directly join the PRI...

R.A: We never did, nor did we back PRI's policies. We always said instead that in such particular respect they took a very honorable stance on Cuba. Mexico kept that policy out of respect for non-intervention programs, and we did the same.

N.K: Because the PRI wouldn't submit to U.S.'s mandate in the OAS [Organization of American States] but at the same time there was the Tlatelolco massacre, people were missing, trade union bureaucracy was calling the shots, the natives were being mistreated...

R.A: Still, take notice of how much Latin America has changed. That happened then but things are more complicated today, or should I say, less simple.

N.K: Cuba is now less isolated than in those years...

R.A: We've been breaking that isolation for many years, but I don't think Cuba's isolation is the issue here. I believe the point now is to help articulate actions and agreements to contribute to independence and alternative integration in this region. What the Bolivarian Revolution stands for today, which is embodied in solidarity with Venezuela, that's the main task. Venezuela is the focal point now due to its significance for the reactivation of and chances for a movement not only solidly rooted in society but potentially capable of interacting with governments.

I was in the two rallies in Mar del Plata but not in the one held inside the fences, where Chávez was. He told the American and Canadian presidents: "If you remember, in Quebec I was all alone, but as you can see now I'm accompanied'. By Lula, Kirchner, Tabaré Vázquez and the Paraguayan chancellor. It was something unthinkable back in the 1960s. Who other than Che Guevara criticized the Alliance for Progress? There's also Evo's victory in Bolivia, and the prospect of further changes in Latin America that can't be disregarded. Armed struggle is not the issue today...

N.K: That's exactly why the questioning over social movements...

R.A: Bolivia's indigenous movements are an interesting case. Prior to the elections I signed several cooperation agreements, already under way, with a group of mayors in a meeting convoked by MAS, the Bolivian left-wing social movement. They were not an underground movement, they enjoyed governmental authority at the time. The first place Evo visited was Havana, which sent a clear signal. And we'll do anything we can to help him. Another important thing, which I mentioned at a rally in Bamako [Republic of Mali, Africa]: it is not only the first time a president who stands for indigenous people's interests wins the elections, but also the first victory of the social movements. In this debate taking place in the forum about separating the movements from the governments I said: are we going to leave Evo and his movement out of the picture because they won? Evo always speaks in those terms: more than a party's victory, it's the social movements' victory. Evo was able to guide them with electoral purposes and win, and by a landslide at that, which will have an inevitable impact beyond Bolivia.

Truth is, reaching a balance is not easy, but I don't think you can point to any statement by a Cuban authority taking sides with any sector opposed to these friendly governments or

either supporting the latter. I do have said, when asked, that I have high regard for companero Lula as a person, I believe he's an honest man. Some people in Brazil may certainly disagree, but I know Lula since he was a simple metalworker and find it very hard to associate him with corruption. I don't believe it about Dirceu either; it's difficult to believe what they say about him.

N.K: As persons, but what about their economic policies?

R.A: That's another thing. We Cubans highly appreciate the principle of non-intervention and respect for national sovereignty, so we don't like to judge anyone. But I think many poor Brazilians realize that Lula's as the government which has most sensitized with their problems.

N.K: Of course, that's because all Cuban political leaders can hold those heads of state in high esteem. Yet, could there be any authority in Cuba's political life, such as FMC [Federation of Cuban Women], CTC [Cuban Trade Unions] or FEU [Federation of University Students] or a Cuban social movement which support Latin American social protest movements without being Cuba's official voice? In sum, if any supports social movements that take a critical stand. By way of hypothesis, let's suppose Fidel forms an alliance with Kirchner about a specific subject. Can there be a Cuban social movement linked with any Argentinean piquetero movement opposed to Kirchner so that they state their support for those movements when Kirchner sends them to prison or to trial in order to neutralize their protests?

R.A: I don't see any contradiction therein. Conferences have been held in Havana which those sectors have attended and where they have expressed their views and vilified a given Latin American government. At any rate, it's true that there's a kind of "self-censorship" pretty much addressed in our media. It has to do with a style, a way of working, that's just one of the negative remnants of the Soviet model. A method of operation, though it's not as simple as that, which poses a challenge to Cuba at a governmental level but also to those organizations since now the existing reality is more complicated and richer in nuances.

Neither Fidel nor I have ever made a statement against Lula, or against the MST for that matter. I have talked about this with [MST leader Joao Pedro] Stedile, but they also have a problem: they can't look at the government as their No. 1 enemy. It used to be much easier before, both for them and for us, as well as for our trade unions, our students, etc.

Our FEU [Federation of University Students] would certainly have to make many statements different from those the Chancellery would have to make for reasons of solidarity. I'm sure they did in the old days. Expressions of solidarity were immediately aired at the time when Mexico voted in the OAE or when something big happened regarding the Mexican students. And of course, whenever there was a discussion or a voting within the IUS [International Union of Students, Prague], the most complicated issue then, they acted autonomously.

But it was so easier when there were the good guys and the bad guys in opposite sides. It's not like that anymore. In line with Cuban strategy, we emphasize establishing as broad a front as possible to fight imperialism and the FTAA, in defense of Chávez, ALBA [Bolivarian

Alternative for the Americas] and now Evo, and add to it as much as we can. That's the focal point, what you will very often hear from us. And that's what any FEU or a trade union member repeats in their statements.

N.K. and L.A.: Some of those "progressive" governments in this region explicitly set out to strengthen the so-called "national" bourgeois sectors. However, in debates on contemporary social sciences, thinkers like Samir Amin, James Petras, Immanuel Wallerstein, Francois Houtart and others maintain that founding a national capitalism at this stage of world capitalism is unfeasible. On the other hand, all along its history, from the famous Second Declaration of Havana to OLAS [Organization of Latin American Solidarity], including countless of Fidel's speeches and Che's writings, the Cuban Revolution has taken on questioning the dependent, abetting and subservient role played by those native or "national" middle classes and their alleged ability to free our America from the bondage of imperialism, its chief partner. Taking all this into account, is it possible to deem these projects to revive national, "human-faced" capitalisms a realistic possibility?

R.A: I agree with whoever believes it's not possible to construct a national capitalism. We've had cases in Latin America. For instance, there's a national bourgeoisie in Brazil, and to some extent in Argentina. In Cuba we never had an independent national bourgeoisie seeking to assert itself. There is in Brazil. But I wouldn't bet on that in today's global context.

Now, where's the problem from the viewpoint of a revolutionary strategy? Should we rule out any possibility to concur on common efforts with national bourgeoisies, bearing in mind that they stand for the nation's interests in front of the empire? I guess not.

N.K: But the question is whether those national bourgeoisies really exist. Perhaps they do in speech, statements and slogans, but many economists who have studied this subject empirically and are familiar with it declare that no national bourgeoisie exists nowadays. There's a native or indigenous bourgeoisie, but for instance, in Argentina, it's been too close to international financial capital since general Videla's dictatorship [1976]... They don't even have Perón's project from the mid-1940s anymore...

R.A: I'm not very familiar with the case of Argentina, so let's take Brazil. If the FTAA was not implemented before, when not even Chávez was around, it is because there was an obstacle called Brazil. We don't include Fernando Henrique [Cardoso, former president of Brazil] in the list of "progressive" governments, to use your own words, but Brazil has always tried to defend its best interests against free trade as promoted by the United States. To say the least, there are sectors within the Brazilian bourgeoisie willing to protect its interests from the most powerful market forces, as it happened perhaps in Mexico in the past, if not even longer under the free trade agreement.

Prior to Fernando Henrique Cardoso, when there was a military dictatorship in Brazil, I was ambassador to the United Nations. Brazil was Cuba's major political contender in Latin America. We confronted each other over everything and agreed on nothing. Yet, despite all that, we took the same positions concerning economic issues, the ones related to

development which gave rise to so much discussion in the 1970s. Meanwhile, the rest of Latin America was fully submitted to the U.S.! We wouldn't even shake hands with the Brazilians, but at times we had similar opinions on important topics and therefore needed to come up with diplomatic, if unacknowledged, formulas to support each other. What I noticed is that they were the only ones in this region who had their own aims, not those of the working class or the revolution, but their own bourgeois interests, as fascistic as they were. And they in turn understood that they agreed with the communists and not with their bourgeois friends.

It seems to me that Chávez provides the right contribution through his formulation of 21st Century Socialism, which is not just any kind of socialism, for its features are similar to Venezuela's. Empirical data documents Venezuela's economic growth, mainly in the private economy. In revolutionary, Bolivarian Venezuela there's room for, and it's used by, the domestic bourgeoisie. They're out for Chávez's blood, but at the same time doing business, investing and making profits in the meantime. [Vice-president José Vicente] Rangel told me that private economy is growing the fastest. So, if it is growing while there's talk about a 21st Century Socialism, the door is open to discussion about and awareness of the need to defend socialism as the real alternative. That possible better world is either socialist or nothing at all, but under a rather different socialism. What's more, it would be socialisms, in plural: ways to organize society on basis of solidarity, equality, etc. We would have to part with Marxism's classic, traditional approach. I don't think that's the issue today. A Marxist or a revolutionary has to do at all times whatever it takes to advance revolution, even if the ultimate outcome is a classless society. I believe in the Marxist approach.

The only reason for all that is taking place around the World Social Forum is that today, in times of neoliberal globalization, an objective possibility exists to bring together everything which opposes real capitalism, which may include, and truly includes in theory, capitalist sectors affected by capitalism as it is nowadays.

The so-called real socialism had problems with some socialists; the term "real socialism" itself was some bureaucrats' response to criticism. They said that real socialism is what we've got here, and the rest were just lucubrations. Consequently, you were not a socialist if you didn't endorse the socialism that "really" existed.

Capitalism is seeing that in its mirror. There are forces which are not anti-capitalist, at least not in our books, but are now acting against the existing capitalism, present-day capitalism, the only one there is. Thus, I think you must devise tactics to march alongside all those people insofar as it is possible, keeping in mind that any project to revive national capitalisms are unrealistic; I don't believe in them. But it would make no sense to refuse to go hand in hand with those forces. On the contrary, now we have a chance to draft a much more flexible speech, like the Declaration of Porto Alegre, a minimum, all-encompassing platform capable of adding people to the struggle against the truly existing capitalism. That's where socialism will start taking shape, which in my opinion will necessarily mean socialisms.

The bright side of the crisis we endured in the past, the demise of the socialist countries, is that there's no more counterposing between two blocks or two systems, and hence no need

to copy any models. Now is the time of [early 20th century Peruvian Marxist thinker] Mariátegui: "Neither rubbings nor copies, but heroic creation". And if it is a creation, each will have to be different. Socialism in Venezuela, if attained, won't be like Cuba's. That's why I like Chávez's phrase, 21st Century Socialism, because it's very open and takes into account all these facts.

Rebelión / La Haine

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