



Cuba: Confronting "real capitalism"

STUART MUNCKTON :: 30/07/2006

Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly and one of the revolution's central leaders, gave a wide-ranging interview to Nestor Kohan and Luciano Alzaga, which was published on La Haine website on April 18. The interview covered many key global issues and controversial questions, from Washington's "war on terror", to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's call for the construction of a "new socialism for the 21st century", to Cuba's relationship with other governments and social movements in the region.

The interview began with Alarcon answering questions relating to the practice of US President George Bush's administration in transferring prisoners it has captured as part of its "war on terror" to third countries where torture is legal, and the exposure of some European countries' complicity. Alarcon commented that "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." He argued that what is new is that the Bush administration now "openly acknowledges torture and turns it into a doctrine, which most likely upset many within the establishment".

Alarcon pointed out that when Bush, in one of his State of the Union speeches, acknowledged the practice of his government in carrying out extrajudicial executions as part of the "war on terror", this was not met with any condemnation by European or US politicians or media outlets. He made the admission "before the US Congress, and he received an ovation, not a protest".

Alarcon argued that the US is "a nation whose foundations and origins lie in genocide. It is a profoundly racist society." He pointed out that "Bush first referred to this topic when 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."

"In those [Latin American] countries where [US-backed] dictators kept secret prisons, torture was practised under US advice and guidance, and it took place under neo-conservative, liberal democratic, moderate democratic, conservative republican and moderate republican governments. They have been doing it forever."

Alarcon pointed to the response of the US government to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that hit New Orleans last year. Thousands of poor citizens - mostly African Americans - were abandoned, highlighting both the deep-seated racism in US society and the "logical outcome of today's neoliberalism". He contrasted Cuba's response in similar situations: "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."

Alarcon argued that this is a product of different social systems, saying "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."

'Progressive governments"

Kohan and Alzaga probed Alarcon about the relationship between revolutionary Cuba and other governments in the region that provide diplomatic support for Cuba and are often considered to be "progressive" due to a greater willingness to act independently of Washington, on the one hand, and social movements that oppose the internal policies of those governments, on the other. In particular, Alarcon was quizzed as to why, at the Summit of the Americas meeting last November where US plans to impose the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) were defeated, did the Cuban delegation, including Alarcon, only attend those protests that were officially supported by the Argentinean government of Nestor Kirchner.

Alarcon responded by pointing out that at the two protests he attended during the summit, there were both supporters and critics of the Argentinean government present. He said that while he "respects" the social movements that participated in the protest outside the summit, ultimately the FTAA was defeated inside the summit as a result of the alliance that Venezuela's Chavez was able to form with other governments such as those of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, which are led by presidents considered to be progressive. The FTAA was not stopped "by the piqueteros [unemployed activists], the Cuban communists or the trade unionists, but five Latin American governments, any differences with them notwithstanding". It was the willingness of these countries to act independently of Washington that upset the Bush administration the most, rather than the protests outside, he argued.

Acknowledging that, threatened by US imperialism, the Cuban government needs to develop the widest possible diplomatic relations, Kohan and Alzaga asked Alarcon if this stops Cuban mass organisations from developing links with and acting in solidarity with social movements against government policy inside such countries. The Cuban government has close links with the governments of Argentina and Brazil, for example, but social movements in both countries are protesting their own government's anti-people policies.

Alarcon explained that the Cuban government applies the principle of non-interference in other nations, and therefore doesn't take a formal position either for or against policies of either friendly governments or social movements. "We have tried to remain respectful to everyone. Some governments frankly deserve respect, as do some movements" autonomy." He pointed out that Cuba hosts conferences featuring social movements from the region where governments that Cuba has close diplomatic ties to are "vilified". He did acknowledge, though, that "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."

However Alarcon argued that the question goes deeper than just the potential contradiction between diplomacy and international solidarity, to one of revolutionary strategy today. He said: "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 ... 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."

Alarcon argued that the era of armed struggle as a strategy had passed and that the relationship of forces, with the coming to power of governments willing to take positions independent of imperialism, has changed in a positive direction. As well as the development of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, he highlighted the victory in Bolivia's presidential elections of the indigenous leader Evo Morales. Alarcon argued that for Bolivia, "it is not only the first time a president who stands for indigenous people's interests won the elections, but also the first victory of the social movements".

Alarcon pointed out that in the 1960s, Cuba was alone in Latin America in voicing anti-imperialist policies, but now, more countries are expressing opposition. This creates the potential for a broad front against imperialism, even where there are differences.

Asked about the explicit project of some governments, such as in Argentina and Brazil, to strengthen "national capitalism" in their own countries, Alarcon commented: "I agree with whoever believes it's not possible to construct a national capitalism." Alarcon defended the arguments made by historic leaders of the Cuban Revolution such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, that in a world dominated by imperialism it is not possible for countries oppressed by imperialism to develop along capitalist lines. However, he pointed out that there have been some examples, such as in Brazil, where a national bourgeoisie has been willing to assert its interests against imperialism and it is important to take advantage of this contradiction to attempt to advance anti-imperialist policies.

21st century socialism

Alarcon argued that socialism remains the solution, but each attempt to build socialism can be different. "It seems to me that Chavez 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 Chavez's blood, but at the same time doing business, investing and making profits in the meantime ... 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."

According to Alarcon, "Today, in times of neoliberal globalisation, an objective possibility exists to bring together everything that opposes real capitalism, which may include 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 ... Consequently, you were not a socialist if you didn't endorse the socialism that 'really' existed."

Alarcon argued: "There are forces that 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 projects to revive national capitalisms are unrealistic." He pointed out that "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."

The full version of the interview is a must-read for those who want to understand the current perspectives of the Cuban government for the struggle against imperialism and a revolutionary socialist strategy. The interview has been translated by Walter Lippmann, the moderator of CubaNews, and the transcript can be found on his website at walterlippmann.com [and [here](#)].

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