

THE WORLD HALF A CENTURY LATER

On the 51st anniversary of the victory of the Revolution two days ago, the memories of that January 1st, 1959 came flooding back to me. None of us ever thought that half a century later, a time that has flown past very fast, we would be remembering it as if it were only yesterday.

On December 28, 1958, during the meeting at the Oriente sugar mill with the Commander in Chief of the enemy forces, whose elite units were besieged with no possibility of escaping, he admitted his defeat and appealed to our generosity to try finding an honorable way out for the rest of his forces. He was aware of our humane treatment of prisoners and injured enemies without exception. He accepted the agreement I proposed, even though I warned him that the ongoing operations would proceed uninterrupted. However, he traveled to the capital and, incited by US embassy, he promoted a coup d'état.

We were preparing for the combats of that day January 1st when in the early morning hours we learned that the tyrant had escaped. Right away orders were issued to the Rebel Army not to accept a ceasefire and carry on the fight at all fronts. At the same time, through Radio Rebelde the workers were called on to declare a Revolutionary general strike, which was immediately backed by the entire nation. The attempted coup was defeated and that same day, in the afternoon, our victorious troops entered Santiago de Cuba.

Meanwhile, Che and Camilo were instructed to quickly advance by road with their brave and experienced forces on vehicles toward La Cabaña and the Military Camp at Columbia. The adversary army, beat in every front, would not have the capacity to resist. By then, the people had revolted and seized the repression centers and police stations. In the evening of January 2, accompanied by a reduced escort, I met in a Bayamo stadium with over two thousand soldiers from the tank, artillery and mechanized infantry forces that we had been fighting against until the previous day. They still carried their weapons with them. We had won the respect of the adversary with our audacious but humanitarian methods of fighting the irregular war. This is how, after 25 months fighting a war we had resumed with a few rifles, in only four days approximately one hundred thousand air, sea and ground weapons and the entire power of the government fell in the hands of the Revolution. I'm relating in a few lines what happened in those days 51 years ago.

It was then that the main battle started to preserve the independence of Cuba opposite the most powerful empire that ever was; a battle our people have waged with great dignity. Today, I am pleased to see those who defended our homeland --despite incredible obstacles, sacrifices and risks--that in these days are happily enjoying the glories of every New Year in the company of their children, their parents and their beloved.

However, these days are in no way similar to those of the past. We are living a new era that resembles no other in history. In the past, the peoples fought and still fight with honor for a better world with more justice but today they must also fight --with no other choice--for the survival of the human species. We don't know anything if we ignore that. Cuba is undoubtedly one of the countries in the world with a highest political education. It started from the most shameful illiteracy, and what is even worse: our Yankee masters and the bourgeoisie associated to the foreign owners were in possession of the land, the sugar mills, the factories that produced consumer goods, the storage facilities, the shops, the utility companies, the telephones, the banks, the mines, the insurance services, the docks, the bars, the hotels, the offices, the housing, the movie theaters, the printing shops, the magazines, the newspapers, the radio, the emerging television and everything of value.

Once the burning flames of our battles for liberation had faded, the Yankees took upon themselves the task of thinking for the people that had fought so hard to be the owner of their independence, their wealth and their destiny; nothing belonged to us then, not even the task of thinking politically. How many of us could read or write? How many could complete the sixth grade of grammar school? I remember this especially in a day like this because that was the country that supposedly belonged to the Cubans. I don't mention other things because I'd have to include many more such as the best schools, the best hospitals, the best houses, the best doctors, the best lawyers. How many of us had access to them? Who, if not a few exceptions, had the natural and divine right to be managers or leaders?

No millionaire or rich man, without exception, failed to be the leader of a Party, a Senator, a Representative or a senior official. That was the representative and pure democracy that prevailed in our homeland, except that the Yankees whimsically imposed ruthless and heartless petty tyrants when it was most convenient to their interests for better defending their properties from landless farmers and employed or unemployed workers. As practically no one even speaks of that, I venture to remember it. Our country is one of the 150 Third World countries, which will be the first albeit not the only ones destined to endure the incredible consequences if humanity does not develop quite rapidly a clear and certain conscience of the reality and the result of climate change provoked by man, that is, if such change is not timely prevented.

Our media have described the effects of climate change while the increasingly intensive hurricanes, the droughts and other natural calamities have equally contributed to the education of our people on the issue. Likewise, a peculiar event, the battle on climate change that took place in the Copenhagen Summit, has helped to build awareness about the imminent danger. This is not one distant risk awaiting the 22nd century, but one for the 21st; neither is it only for the second half of the latter but for the next decades when we would start suffering its terrible consequences.

This is not a simple action against the empire and its henchmen that in this area, as in everything else, try to impose their stupid and selfish interests but rather a world public opinion battle that can't be left to spontaneity or to the whim of most media. It's a situation that is fortunately known to millions of honest and brave people in the world, a battle to be waged with the masses and within social organizations and scientific, cultural and humanitarian institutions and other international outfits, but very especially in the United Nations where the US administration, its NATO allies and the richest countries tried to deal a fraudulent and antidemocratic blow in Denmark against the rest of the emerging and poor nations of the Third World.

In Copenhagen, the Cuban delegation, which attended alongside others from ALBA and the Third World, was forced to fight strongly in the face of the amazing events originated by the speeches made by Yankee President Barack Obama and the group of richest states in the planet determined to do away with the binding agreements of Kyoto --where the thorny issue was discussed more than 12 years ago-- and to place the burden of the sacrifices on the emerging and the underdeveloped countries which happen to be the poorest and, at the same time, the main providers of raw materials and non-renewable resources of the planet to the most developed and affluent.

Obama showed up in Copenhagen the last day of the Conference which had begun on December 7. The worst of his behavior was that when he had already made the decision to send 30 thousand soldiers to the carnage in Afghanistan --a country with a strong tradition of independence that not even the British in their best and cruelest times could submit--he traveled to Oslo to receive no less than the Nobel Peace Prize. On December 10, he arrived in the Norwegian capital where he made an empty and demagogic speech full of justifications. On the 18th, the last day of the Summit, he appeared in Copenhagen where he had initially planned to spend only 8 hours. The Secretary of State and a selective group of her best strategists had come in the previous day.

The first thing that Obama did was to choose a group of guests who had the honor of accompanying him

to address the Summit. With a permissive and flattering attitude, the Danish Prime Minister, who was chairing the Summit, granted the floor to the group of hardly more than 15 persons. The imperial leader deserved special honors. His speech was a combination of sweet words seasoned with theatrical gestures which have become boring for those who, like me, have decided to listen to him to try being objective in the assessment of his characteristics and political intentions. Obama imposed on his docile Danish host that only his guests could take the floor, although as soon as he made his speech he “disappeared” through a back door, as a leprechaun running away from an audience that had made him the honor of listening attentively.

After the authorized list of speakers had finished, a man who is every inch an Aymara native, Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, who had just been reelected with 65% of the votes, claimed his right to take the floor which was granted to him in light of the overwhelming applause of those present. In only nine minutes he exposed deep and honorable concepts in response to the words of the already absent president of the United States. Immediately afterwards Hugo Chavez stood up to ask for the floor on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The chairman of the session had no choice but to give the floor to him too; he then improvised one of the most brilliant speeches I’ve heard him make. After that, the sound of the gavel put an end to the unusual session.

However, the extremely busy Obama and his entourage did not have a minute to lose. His group had worked out a Draft Declaration full of vague remarks that was a denial of the Kyoto Protocol. After he had precipitously left the plenary hall, he met with other groups of guests, not even 30 people, to negotiate privately and in small groups. He insisted and brought up millionaire figures of green bills without a gold backing and constantly devaluated, and he even threatened to leave the meeting if his demands were not accepted. The worst of all is that it was a meeting of the superrich countries to which some of the most important emerging nations were invited alongside two or three poor countries. The document was submitted to these as a ‘take it or leave it’ proposal.

Later, the Danish Prime Minister tried to present such a confusing, ambiguous and contradictory declaration --in whose discussion the United Nations took no part whatsoever—as the Summit Accord. The sessions had concluded and almost every head of State or Government and Foreign Minister had left for their respective countries when, at three in the morning, the distinguished Danish Prime Minister introduced it to the plenary where hundreds of long-suffering officials, who had not slept for three days, received the complicated document and only an hour to examine it and decide on its approval.

That’s when the meeting grew highly volatile. The delegates had not had time to read it. Several of them asked for the floor. The first one was the delegate of Tuvalu whose islands will be under water if the proposal contained in the document is approved; the delegates of Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua followed suit. The dialectic confrontation that took place at 3:00 AM of December 19 is worth of being recorded by history, if history is to last long after the climate change.

As a good part of what happened is known in Cuba or can be found in the Internet, I will only offer part of the two responses given by Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez since they are worthy of reading to know the final episodes of the Copenhagen soap opera, as well as the elements of the last chapter which have yet to be published in our country.

“Mr. Chairman, [Prime Minister of Denmark]...the document that you repeatedly claimed that did not exist is showing up now. We have all seen drafts surreptitiously circulated and discussed in secret meetings, outside the rooms where the international community has been transparently negotiating through its representatives.”

“I add my voice to that of the representatives of Tuvalu, Venezuela and Bolivia. Cuba considers the text of this apocryphal draft extremely insufficient and inadmissible.”

“The document that you are unfortunately introducing contains no commitment whatsoever on the reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions.”

"I am aware of the previous drafts, which again through questionable and clandestine procedures, were negotiated in small groups and which at least made reference to a 50% reduction by 2050."

"The document that you are introducing now leaves out precisely those already meager and insufficient key phrases contained in those drafts. This document does not guarantee, in any way, the adoption of minimal measures conducive to the prevention of an extremely grave catastrophe for the planet and for human beings."

"This shameful document that you bring to us is also insufficient and ambiguous with regards to the specific commitment of the developed countries to reduce emissions even when they are responsible for the global warming resulting from the historic and current level of their emissions, and it is only fit that they undertake meaningful reductions right away. This document fails to mention any commitment by the developed nations."

"Your document, Mr. Chairman, is the death certificate of the Kyoto Protocol that my delegation refuses to accept."

"The Cuban delegation wishes to emphasize the preeminence of the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," as the main concept in the future process of negotiations. Your document does not have a word on that."

"The Cuban delegation reiterates its protest against the grave breach of procedure that has surfaced in the antidemocratic way this conference has been conducted, particularly by resorting to arbitrary, exclusive and discriminatory formats of debate and negotiation."

"Mr. Chairman, I formally request that this statement be included in the final report on the works of this shameful and regrettable 15th Conference of the Parties."

What was unthinkable is that after another long recess and when everybody thought that only the official procedures remained to conclude the Summit, the Primer Minister of the host country, incited by the Yankees, would make another attempt at having the document passed by consensus of the Summit when there were not even foreign ministers present in the plenary hall. The delegates of Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba who had remained alert and insomniac until the last minute thwarted the last maneuver in Copenhagen.

Still, the problem was far from over. The powerful are not used to meet with resistance and do not admit it. On December 30, the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations, in New York, politely informed our Mission in that city that it had taken note of the Copenhagen Accord of December 18, 2009, and was forwarding an advanced copy of that decision. It literally read: "...the Government of Denmark in its capacity as COP15 Presidency invites Parties to the Convention to inform the UNFCCC Secretariat in a written form at their earliest convenience of their willingness to be associated with the Copenhagen Accord."

This unexpected communication motivated the response of the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations, that "...categorically rejects the attempt to indirectly approve a text that was repudiated by several delegations not only for its insufficiency in light of the serious effects of climate change but also because it just responded to the interests of a limited group of nations."

Likewise, the First Vice minister of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment of the Republic of Cuba, Dr. Fernando Gonzalez Bermudez, forwarded a letter to Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, some of whose paragraphs I reproduce here:

"We have received with surprise and concern the Note circulated by the Danish Government to the

Permanent Missions of the UN member states in New York --of which you are certainly aware-- inviting the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to inform the Executive Secretariat in a written form and at their earliest convenience of their willingness to be associated with the so-called Copenhagen Accord."

"We have seen with additional concern that the Danish Government is informing that the Executive Secretariat of the Convention will include in the report of the COP 15 held in Copenhagen a list of the Parties to the Convention that have expressed their willingness to be associated with this Accord."

"The Republic of Cuba considers this behavior a crude and reprehensible violation of the decision made in Copenhagen where, in view of the obvious lack of consensus, the Parties to the Convention simply took note of the existence of such document."

"Nothing agreed at the COP15 entitles the Government of Denmark to adopt this course of action, and the Executive Secretariat does not have a mandate to include in the final report a list of Parties to the Convention."

"I must say that the Government of the Republic of Cuba strongly rejects this new attempt at indirectly legitimizing a spurious document and reaffirms that this behavior sets a dangerous precedent for the Convention's works and impairs the good-faith spirit with which the delegations should carry on the negotiating process next year," concluded the Cuban First Vice minister of Science, Technology and the Environment.

Many in the world, especially the social movements and the best informed people of the humanitarian, cultural and scientific institutions are aware that the document promoted by the United States is a step backward from the positions reached by those who are making efforts to prevent a colossal catastrophe to our species. There is no point in repeating here facts and figures that prove it mathematically. The data can be found in the Internet; they are within reach of a growing number of people interested in the subject.

The theory used to defend adherence to the document is weak and implies a step backward. The deceitful idea is invoked that the wealthy nations would contribute the measly figure of 30 billion dollars in three years to poor countries to pay for the costs of facing climate change. This figure could then be raised to 100 billion annually by the year 2020, something that in this extremely serious issue is tantamount to waiting until Hell freezes over. The experts know that these figures are ridiculous and unacceptable given the magnitude of the investments required. The source of such figures is vague and confusing; therefore, no one is committed to this.

What's the value of one dollar? What's the meaning of 30 billion dollars? We all know that since Bretton Woods, in 1944, until Nixon's executive order in 1971, --aimed at throwing on the world economy the cost of the genocidal Vietnam war-- the value of one dollar, measured in gold, has decreased and is today about 32 times lower than it was then. That is, 30 billions mean less than 1 billion, and 100 billion divided by 32 equals 3.1 billions, which at the moment would not be enough to build a middle size oil refinery.

If the industrialized nations ever honored their promise to give the developing countries 0.7% of their GDP --something they never did but for few exceptions--the figure would exceed 250 billion dollars each year.

The US administration has spent 800 billions to bail out the banks, how much would it be willing to spend to save the 9 billion people who will live on the planet by 2050, if there are no severe droughts or floods associated to a rising sea resulting from the meltdown of glaciers and of large masses of frozen water in Greenland and the Antarctic?

Let's not be deceived. What the United States intended with its maneuvers in Copenhagen was to divide

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the Third World, that is, to separate over 150 countries from China, India, Brazil, South Africa and others with whom we should close ranks to defend in Bonn's, in Mexico's or at any other international conference, alongside the social, scientific and humanitarian organizations, real Accords that can benefit every country and protect humanity from a catastrophe conducive to the extinction of our species.

The world is in possession of an ever greater amount of information but the politicians' time to think is ever smaller.

The wealthy nations and their leaders, including the US Congress, seem to be debating who will be the last to disappear.

When the 28 parties proposed by Obama to celebrate this Christmas are over, if that of the Epiphany was included perhaps The Three Wise Men --Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar-- could advise him what to do.

I apologize for the lengthy article but I did not want to split this Reflection in two. I beg my patient readers their indulgence.

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