

# **The June Error**

**The Mediocre Comedy of Cuban Leninism**

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“Freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice; socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality”

M. Bakunin

In the past month (June 2010), we have seen a proliferation of articles about “critical collaboration” from the “contradictory insider,” along with calls for “revolutionary cohesion” and “dialogue without sectarianism” and invitations to reach consensus—in the revolutionary ranks—about the supposedly unavoidable transition to Socialism in Cuba. These calls have occurred in the context of an undeniable atmosphere of mild criticism that has been growing in strength within certain quarters that still remain devoted to the Castro brothers’ government and their sole and exclusive Party.

## Old accusations from new positions

It is rather remarkable that in these crucial times the old slogans have returned, reworked into new formulations that timidly feature the very same points that, fifty years ago and in a much stronger fashion, the anarchists from the Cuban Libertarian Association (Asociación Libertaria Cubana—ALC<sup>1</sup> raised in a manifesto<sup>2</sup> written at the beginning of 1959. At that time, they criticized in no uncertain terms the growing “state centralism” of the Castro regime that was leading to an “authoritarian order,” while recalling the principal role that Cuban anarchists had played in the struggle against the dictatorship of President-General Fulgencio Batista. They also denounced the obscene strategy of the Communist Party of Cuba (Partido Comunista de Cuba -PCC) that aimed to “recover the hegemony that [...]it enjoyed during the period of Batista’s rule. In a similar vein, the February 15, 1959 issue of *Solidaridad Gastronómica*, in a Manifesto to the Workers and the People in General, warned, in the face of the Castro regime’s top-down decisions to leave in their leadership posts the pack of PCC cadres that so loyally served Batista’s dictatorship while simultaneously removing the anarchosyndicalists from the proletarian ranks: “It is imperative that it be the workers themselves who decide the ousting of the past leaders, otherwise we will fall into the same procedures we fought against yesterday.”<sup>3</sup> The anarchist journal, in its editorial of March 15 1959, also condemned the “dictatorial means [...] agreements and mandates from above that impose rules, and install and remove leaders,” denounced the “uncritical elements [...] in assemblies, who, not even part of the union organization, still raise their hands in favor of the decisions of the leadership,” and went on to describe some of the intimidation techniques used to achieve hegemony: “[...] they fill the assemblies with armed militiamen who flagrantly threaten

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<sup>1</sup> The survivors of the revolutionary anarchism of 1920 to 1940, gathered in the Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba (FGAC) and Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (SIA) decided to hold an assembly at the beginning of the 40’s with the intention of regrouping the libertarian effort under a single organization, dissolving both the FGAC and the SIA in order to form a new organization named the Asociación Libertaria de Cuba (ALC). See Frank Fernández, *El anarquismo en Cuba*, Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, Madrid 2000, p. 73. Around mid-1960 the members of the ALC were imprisoned or exiled. In 1961, exiled former members of this association, formed the current Movimiento Libertario Cubano (MLC) in New York City.

<sup>2</sup> See *Solidaridad Gastronómica*, Vol X. No. 1, Havana, Jan. 15, 1959, pp. 6–7.

<sup>3</sup> Signed by the Secretary of Labor of the ALC, dated January 18, 1959 and published in *Solidaridad Gastronómica* of February 15, 1959. Cf. *Solidaridad Gastronómica*, Vol. X. No. 2, Havana, Feb. 15, 1959, pp. 7 and 11.

people; they don't respect the rules of order [...] and use any means to maintain control of the unions."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, as the saying goes, "Better late than never." But the truth is that not only do the recent calls arrive rather late in the day; they are also written in a kind of weak digital Morse code. Curiously, they repeat the old criticisms. They openly accept that "the dangerous sectarian practice continues to this day" and affirm that "In Cuba today we can see with full clarity the reactionary sectarian character of those actions that create divisions and resentments and impede the advancement of socialism". Yet they avoid recognizing that these same warnings were made at the very beginning of the revolutionary process by those committed to Socialism and Freedom. They also avoid an in-depth examination of the roots of the problem.

As comrade Ramón García Guerra correctly points out, "the question requires delving into the problem of the consequences of policies. It also demands an analysis of who benefits and who doesn't [...] the current critique speculates about popular discontent while appealing to common sense. The critics know that uncertainty makes people unhappy. As a solution, they now offer us a return to the times when everything seemed to work well in society. (Curiously, this comes from those who think they will benefit from a return to the past.) The opposite reaction would be to foster immobility in the face of the need for change in society. This policy is another way to speculate with common sense. Then they appeal to fear. In the end, we are held hostage to collective dreams and fears that impede imagining other possible realities. In contrast, the criticism we make seeks to turn the malaise into consciousness that will facilitate change [...]"<sup>5</sup>

The new critics propose an alternative "vision," an alternative they do not wish to impose on anyone. Instead, they want to "spread it, debate it and look for a way to include it as part of the solution; although this discussion and its publication in the official media are prohibited".<sup>6</sup> But they ignore the fact that at the beginning of the Revolution, the anarchists proposed for consideration by Cuban society a whole set of questions and alternatives that went much farther and much deeper. But not only were the anarchists denied a hearing; they were also crushed with much violence and relish. Perhaps it is ignorance of this that answers to those "collective fears that impede imagining other possible social realities" that García Guerra talks about.

Of course, it isn't necessary to have knowledge of all the initiatives that were attempted in the past in order to initiate new socialist alternatives to the reactionary barbaric sectarianism that still remains after fifty one years of absolute hegemony. However, we do consider the thorough study of the history of the social-revolutionary movement a requisite of vital importance (not just in the Cuban case but also in the international social-revolutionary movement as a whole) in order to avoid repeating the same errors or to succumb to the same perils and/or deviations.

However, it would be regrettable if the real preoccupations of the Cuban anarchists were to become, once again, an ethereal polemic, while we are again diagnosed with a "desire to show

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<sup>4</sup> See "Hacia dónde va el movimiento obrero", *Solidaridad Gastronómica*, Vol. X, No. 3, Havana, Mar. 15, 1959, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ramón García Guerra in "Contra el silencio de la flecha" available at <[www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/por-verdadero-socialismo-cuba](http://www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/por-verdadero-socialismo-cuba)>.

<sup>6</sup> Pedro Campos in "Cuba. Diálogo sin sectarismos: necesario para la cohesión revolucionaria", available at <[www.kaosenlared.net](http://www.kaosenlared.net)>.

off”, with “opportunistic political behavior”, and with a tendency to “lean towards political gains.”<sup>7</sup> To make such charges reveals a congenital perversity and/or chronic ideological illiteracy.

## Identifying the messengers and locating the sender’s address

At the beginning of this piece, we noted the proliferation— particularly during the month of June (2010)—of articles, proposals, attacks, and replies dressed up as “critical collaboration” from the “contradictory insider,” as well as repeated calls for “revolutionary cohesion” and “dialogue without sectarianism” towards the unavoidable transition to Socialism in Cuba.<sup>8</sup>

Among these many “messages,” one can discern two messengers with differing political agendas, in spite of certain analogies and a similarity of objectives between them.

At first sight, we have two opposing factions with identical return addresses:

One is the “historical vanguard” of the Partido Comunista Cubano, of clear Stalinist style, majoritarian and octogenarian; now serving in high public places and/or being held in reserve under the “pajama plan.”

The other is a new, reformist generation of Communist Party militants and other cadres, of Trotskyist inspiration, close to this institution, minoritarian, aged between 40 and 60, currently serving as low- and middle-level members of the Cuban ruling elite.<sup>9</sup> Also close to this current we find a much more heterodox group of intellectuals who follow a wide spectrum of political doctrines from Swedish Social Democracy and the Italian “communism” of Refundazione, to the Spanish Izquierda Unida and the Bolivarian “socialism of the XXI Century” of Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez.

As comrade Armando Chaguaceda writes, the former group prefers the current option of “a hybrid of barracks communism and capitalist policy (in its state and neoliberal versions)”<sup>10</sup> in addition to the Coca<sup>11</sup> reforms initiated by the President-General. The latter opts for the Fifth Socialist Participative International and proposes as a “solution” the Programmatic Proposal for a Participative and Democratic Socialism (SPD) “proposed from inside the revolution and the Communist Party.”<sup>12</sup>

Of course, were we to choose the lesser evil without the slightest questioning, we would adhere to this latter faction. But this is not the case. Although we know beforehand that it is possible to enter into a debate (and even a dialogue) with the representatives of this reformist current—in fact, for several years we have maintained an open polemic that I would dare to describe

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<sup>7</sup> Roberto Cobas in “Cuba y el compromise con su proyecto socialista mas allá del anarquismo de la polémica” <[www.kaosenlared.net](http://www.kaosenlared.net)>.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth clarifying that with the objective of facilitating study, I have gathered together articles of analysis and virulent anonymous attacks, placed in chronological order, in order to highlight the increase of these “exchanges” during this month.

<sup>9</sup> In order to confirm this statement we only have to notice the posts occupied by some of the more notable exponents (whether or not they have “fallen in disgrace” at any time during their careers: Pedro Campos held diplomatic posts and was also Chief Project Researcher at the Center of Studies on the United States of the University of Havana; Roberto Cobas was a specialist at the Institute of Transportation Research; Soledad Cruz was the Cuban ambassador to UNESCO; the late Celia Hart was director of the Abel Santamaría Museum, among others.

<sup>10</sup> Chaguaceda Armando, *La Campana vibrante. Intelectuales, esfera pública y poder en Cuba: balance y perspectivas de un trienio (2007–2010)*, Instituto de Investigaciones Histórico-Sociales, Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, Veracruz, April 2010, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Co: cosmetic inwardly, and Ca: capitalist outwardly

<sup>12</sup> Campos Pedro, Op cit.

as fraternal, depending more on the personality of our counterparts rather than the ideas s/he professes—we note gross contradictions in their proposals that inevitably make us hesitate to support them.

Even so, we see a huge difference between the voices of the SPD, full of good intentions, as they are, and their barracks grandparents. At least the reformists can not be accused of a single murder, accusation, sentence, beating, or treasonous act; while the barracks Stalinists have been the direct authors of virtually every evil deed committed in Cuba in the past 77 years. Despite this, we observe with astonishment how the the former sign up— perhaps involuntarily, due either to inertia or to fear—to repeat the very same errors their progenitors committed in the past.

## Deciphering the messages

Let's just note the following sentence by Campos<sup>13</sup> in order to analyze the hesitations mentioned above: “[...] more than ever, cohesion is needed in the revolutionary ranks, without stopping the internal ideological struggle to advance socialism” (our emphasis). Two paragraphs below, Campos writes, “[...] the enemies of dialogue, interchange, and understanding, those who would sharpen the contradictions, will always oppose such a movement and will try to sabotage it in order to exacerbate the tensions.” This falsely conflates “those who would sharpen the contradictions,” that is, the social revolutionaries conscious of their role, with “the enemies of dialogue, interchange, and understanding”.

A half-way rational analysis leads us to the conclusion that we are facing a rather acute contradiction that demands questioning Campos about such dialectical acrobatics, at least by asking a couple of questions:

How can one pretend to have “cohesion in the revolutionary ranks without ceasing the internal ideological struggle to advance socialism” without sharpening the contradictions or aggravating the tensions natural to the struggle between the excluded and the included?

With whom are they trying to launch a dialogue and achieve an understanding without sharpening the contradictions or aggravating the tensions?

Campos carefully notes in the same text: “We have insisted for some time on the need to establish a new consensus about the kind of society the Cuban people want, which can not be imposed but must be the result of an exchange of ideas among all revolutionaries and with all Cubans honestly concerned with the well being of their nation [...] Cuba must change in many aspects, and many modifications will have to be made to improve the political system in order to achieve a true participatory democracy, as a society trying to build the never reached socialist paradigm [...] The Cuban people have lived in insecurity for decades, subject to infinite obfuscations and a plethora of regulations of all kinds imposed by different levels of the bureaucracy that plagues the life of the average Cuban, who never knows which way the government will go, who is never able to make long- or even or short-term plans, always vulnerable to the shifting situation and to decisions over which s/he has no say [...] Unless we own up, with all the consequences, to the fact that the bureaucratic system of state ownership, salaried work, and centralization of all decisionmaking—the heritage of Stalinism—have already failed and must therefore be changed, the only guaranteed way forward will be towards ...a deep hole. The rest, such as indefinitely

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

postponing the VI Congress, not publicizing information about the people's proposals, the lack of internal discussion within the revolution, and other maneuvers, can only be interpreted as a ruse to gain "time", hoping for a miracle that will revitalize "the model" ... of disaster. It is necessary both to socialize and to democratize the system or it will crumble. Already, many Cuban revolutionaries have expounded such ideas. So don't blame imperialism later. The bureaucracy, particularly the sectarian dogmatism prevalent in the high leadership of the party and the government, prevents a sincere and committed dialogue inside the revolution [...] In Cuba today one can clearly see the reactionary character of sectarianism in those actions that create divisions, resentments and impediments to the advance of socialism [...]". He concludes "[...] some want us to abandon the policy of critical collaboration with the government-party and take up confrontation. I will not qualify their tired methods and intentions—each one knows his/her reasons—but we will not lend ourselves to campaigns that might even appear to be outside the Revolution or against it. Everything we do is always within the contradictory inside. Personally, I will live or die with and for the Revolution [...]".

I do not doubt that Campos really wants the average Cuban to own his/her destiny and to participate democratically in the debate in order to "establish a new consensus about the society the Cuban people want to live in", one that can not be imposed but that is "the result of the interchange among all the revolutionaries and all honestly interested Cubans" for a change of form and content. But what makes me suspicious is that, after coming this far, Campos ends up mired in an untenable position, since any chance for the Cuban people to control the debate and freely decide the kind of society they want to live in necessarily involves abandoning the policy of collaboration with the regime and overcoming the government-party. These actions involve the social/human emancipation for the full enjoyment of Freedom, a Freedom that does not merely end in the bourgeois freedoms recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or fits within the narrow ballot boxes of an electoral circus but only becomes real with the individual and collective capacity to freely decide one's own life, without any form of domination to co-opt it. Obviously this has nothing to do with lending ourselves to counterrevolutionary campaigns, as Campos hints.<sup>14</sup>

I have no doubt that Campos and his current know this perfectly well. Perhaps, at the end of the road, it can all be reduced to the inconvenient disparities that occur during times of ideological maturation. But what is important has not yet happened.

## Locating the recipients

Generally speaking, two classes of intended recipients of these messages can be identified, without worrying much about the differences in the "color" of the senders. Both sides of the Party aim their SOS's in two directions: abroad and inside:

Abroad, the recipients are their counterparts looking for strategic support. They need weapons and ammo (even if only theoretical-ideological) to help them fight the fratricidal war they face. Gaining control of the Party depends on this. What these foes do not see is the futility of such a fight. The Cuban Communist Party is a huge white elephant marooned in a swimming pool. No matter how much it thrashes, it is destined to drown, either by insisting on swimming to nowhere or by drinking up all the water that surrounds it. The strength and utility of the Party

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<sup>14</sup> Id.

was due to the enormous (and now defunct) imperialist power that supported it. Moscow's gold allowed these Stalinists to keep all the positions they had enjoyed under Batista and to buy as many ministries, directorships, and military ranks they considered necessary to ensure their survival and hegemonic control. The tons of weapons and the millions of barrels of oil provided in exchange for sugar and cannon fodder in overseas military operations assured the prosperity of the "socialist" viceroyalty during the Cold War. It is not by chance that Abraham Grobart (Fabio), one of the most faithful servants of the Comintern on the island, offered the post of General Secretary of the Party (First Secretary) to "comrade" Fidel in 1965, during the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party. Unless they had so much to offer they would never have survived a bourgeois revolution of marked nationalist character, much closer (ideologically speaking) to the Italian national-socialists and Peron's revolutionary populism than to the Marxist legacy. Of course, Leninist pragmatism would lead them to delve into history and justify a common origin (Georges Sorel) of both ideologies (fascism and Leninism).

Internally, the messages have but one recipient: the President-General. Both factions coincide in the search for recognition and in offering their services as "managers," posing as the way to salvation in the face of the immanent implosion. Some try to sell "the unknown good" and others—with their worn-out pajamas or in trusted positions—continue to offer "the known evil", a true and tried product that has allowed the aged brothers to remain in power for over half a century. In sum, the only thing that seems to unite the Party's factions is the search for recognition and the continuity of Power, and for that they offer their services to the President-General. Both the representatives of the SPD and the defenders of barracks Stalinism fall over themselves in their rush to supply the oxygen mask that will revive the moribund regime: Opportunism is inherent in Leninism.

Old Marx was right when he said that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. No doubt the Cuban Leninists have already prepared for the stage a mediocre comedy and aspire to their second performance. Once again, they are preparing to betray the social revolutionary movement and the workers and the people in general; only this time the date has been pushed forward by two months.

## **In spite of all, the view is encouraging**

These words, so full of optimism and encouragement, appeared at the conclusion of the *Solidaridad Gastronómica* editorial of January 1959, in which, as I mentioned at the beginning of this piece, the Cuban anarchists warned of "state centralism" and the obvious "authoritarian order" that was beginning to take shape under the direction of the Castro brothers with the approval of the barracks Leninists. Fifty one years later these words will once again become significant, but only if we reach "cohesion"<sup>15</sup> of the most heterodox of the revolutionary ranks, when "dialogue without sectarianism" is really established, not with the regime's hierarchy, but among the anti-authoritarian socialists searching for alternatives to capitalism, and if, and only if, a consensus is achieved among ALL the tireless fighters for the unavoidable transition to Socialism in Cuba.

Bakunin was able, early on, to observe the deviations and deformations that would ensue if we did not adequately reconcile Socialism and Freedom. His brilliant adage "Liberty without

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<sup>15</sup> Not the apparent "unity" that masks the subordination to a single and hegemonizing thought, as Pedro Campos rightfully notes.



Socialism is privilege and injustice, Socialism without Liberty is slavery and brutality” – assumes even greater importance in the light of our direct experience -literally, in the flesh—of the havoc wrought by Leninism under the State capitalism of those regimes cynically baptized as “real existing socialism”.

We will never achieve “the never-attained socialist paradigm” with abstractions and dialectical maneuvers or with semantic accommodations and well-meaning declarations. If we really want to build a true, direct democracy—self-managed, participatory and decisive—based on Socialism and Freedom, we need to pay attention to welldefined political exigencies that can not take us on any other course than to the end of institutionalized threats of repression. In other words: if we really want to extend direct democracy and encourage popular participation, we have no alternative but the establishment of a broad regime of freedoms built on popular consensus and the cohesion of the moving forces of anti-authoritarian socialism. This is in our hands, not those of the President-General or of any other reactionary leader. It will only be possible by means of the abolition of social prohibitions and the derogation of repressive laws and decrees; by the recognition and respect for individual and collective freedom (freedom of assembly, expression, and movement); promoting self-management of workers and peasants collectives; by promoting labor freedom and the autonomy of workers’ unions, federations, and confederations of workers and peasants, and by refusing any exclusion. We want a diverse, multi-sided Cuba, one in which there can be many Cubas. We want to build a new society without oppressed and exploited, based on Liberty, Equality, Solidarity, Mutual Aid and respect for the Ecology, biodiversity and love of the Earth. This is what the Cuban Libertarian Movement (MLC) proposes in our Six Basic Points of Consensus for Social Change put forth as a minimal agenda of convergence to promote progress towards Socialism in Cuba and “with the objective of consolidating the understanding and of tightening the anti-authoritarian coordination within and outside Cuba” for the strengthening of the growing socialist and participative movement.

As our dear Spósito would affirm with his customary sagacity: “There is not nor can there be fantastic operations, and once more we will have to repeat what has been said so often: a libertarian and socialist creation can not be conceived as the spontaneous result of a vague historical legacy, as the mandate of a leader, as an engineering problem under the guise of central planning, as the autocratic development of technology, or as serendipity or magic. A libertarian socialist society, in Cuba and anywhere else, now as at any other time, can only be the fruit of a profound and autonomous decision and a never ending succession of struggles and attitudes that take shape in the folds of the collective consciousness. In simpler words, there will only be self-management and therefore Socialism in Cuba when and if people want it and when they so decide, and not as a result of some generous dispensation from above [...]”<sup>16</sup>

Unless this happens, there will be no popular participation or direct democracy—let alone arriving at the neverattained social paradigm—in Cuba, since this can not happen through the maneuvers and good-will of the current to which Campos belongs. Instead, we will have “more of the same” and will continue to be stuck in the pathetic wait for Chronos’ designs. In the meantime, we will have to put up with the dictates from the hyperbaric chamber of the “Commander’s reflexions” per saecula saeculorum and the daily speculations about the much heralded reforms

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<sup>16</sup> Spósito Rafael (Daniel Barret), *De Fidel a Raúl: La Cuba de los Politi-Castros*, Montevideo, 2009, p.170. From his book in preparation “Cuba: El dolor de ya no ser.”

of the President-General. Let's hope that the spokesmen for the "June error" will not regret it tomorrow.

For Socialism and Liberty

Gustavo Rodríguez

San Luis Potosí, México, June 25 2010

Translation by Luis Prat

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