KEY ADDRESS BY DR. FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA, AT THE RALLY PROTESTING AND REPUDIATING THE BLOCKADE, THE SLANDERS, THE LIES AND THREATS OF PRESIDENT BUSH HELD AT MAJOR GENERAL CALIXTO GARCIA SQUARE, IN HOLGUIN PROVINCE, ON JUNE 1, 2002 **[1]**

Date:

01/06/2002

Dear compatriots from Holguin, Granma, Las Tunas and from all of Cuba:

On May 20, the day of the shameful show in Miami, it was ironic to listen to Mr. W. Bush claim strongly for independence and freedom, not for Puerto Rico but for Cuba; and to talk much about democracy, not for Florida but for Cuba. Mr. W. made a special point of defending private property, as if it did not exist in Cuba.

I then realized that years pass. The days are really far now when a man spoke from his wheelchair with a soft voice and a persuasive accent. He spoke as a President of the United States of America and he inspired respect. It was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He did not speak like a showoff or a thug, nor was the United States the hegemonic hyperpower it is today.

At that time, Ethiopia had been occupied. The bloody Spanish Civil War had begun. China was being invaded and nazi-fascism was a threat to the world. Roosevelt, who I think was a real statesman, was striving to steer his country away from a dangerous isolationism.

I was then a sixth or seventh grader. I was 12 or 13 years old. I had been born deep in the countryside, where there was no electricity. Sometimes the only way to get there was riding a horse through very muddy dirt roads. Back then, I spent most of the year in a rigid and segregationist boarding school in Santiago --that is, in sexual apartheid, where the boys were kept at great distance from the girls, in schools that were light-years away from each other— with several interspersed holidays and a longer vacation in summer time when I came to Biran.

Those of us who were privileged could have shoes, clothes and be well fed; however, a sea of poverty surrounded us. I don’t know how large is Mr. W’s Texas ranch. I do remember that my father had over 24,700 acres of farmland. Of course, that meant hardly anything as extensive areas, between 272,710 and 284,245 acres, surrounded the family land owned by the West Indies Sugar Company and the United Fruit Company.

I remember that when it was announced that the President of the United States would speak it was tantamount to saying that God would speak. And it was only natural, since everything came from there: the beautiful, the good and the useful things, from a razor blade to a locomotive; from a postcard of the Statue of Liberty to one of those Western films, which fascinated both children and adults.

Moreover, "it was from there that our freedom and independence had come". That was what the dozens

of thousands of farm laborers and farmers with no land of their own were told in those areas where they could only work part of the year cleaning or cutting sugar cane. They went hungry and barefoot, dressed in rags and lived in terror of the ‘rural guard’ --a special force created by the administrators of the country and armed with Springfield rifles and long and thin machetes that became famous. They also used to wear big hats and ride seven-foot-Texas horses that scared with their imposing sizes our undernourished workers ruthlessly suppressed by those guards, if they as much as threatened to revolt or go on strike.

In those immensely extensive fields, where there were huts, thatched-roof shacks, impoverished villages and sugar mills, it was hard to find a single very poor classroom for the 200 or 300 children who lived in the area; there were no books, very few school materials and sometimes not even a teacher. It was only in the hamlets that sprang up around the big sugar mills that there were one or two physicians who basically cared for the families of the foreign sugar companies’ local managers and senior operatives.

On the other hand, a rather strange character could be easily found everywhere. He had no more than a third or a fourth grade of grammar school, but that meant being practically a wise man as compared to the masses of illiterates. He was often a godfather of somebody’s child and an occasional visitor of the families living in the countryside. He was in charge of things related to elections. He obtained the peoples’ ID cards and the promise of their votes; he was the politician’s crony.

The people in the countryside did not intend to sell their votes, but rather help "their friend". With few exceptions, the candidates with most money in their chests, who could hire more political cronies, won the races either for national legislative office or for other county or provincial elective positions. If any of those elections was intended to change the President, --never the political or social system, which was unthinkable-- and if there was any conflict of interests, it was the rural guard that decided who the new leaders would be.

Most of our people were either illiterate or semi-illiterate and they depended on a miserable job arbitrarily handled by an employer or an elected official. The people had no choice, as they even lacked the minimum indispensable knowledge to decide on the increasingly complex issues of this world.

As for the history of our homeland, they only knew the legend passed down by the grandparents and the parents about past heroic struggles fought in the colonial days; eventually, it was fortunate that it was that way. As for the traditional political parties, where the oligarchies that served the empire prevailed, how could our people understand them? Who could teach them? Where could they read about it? With what alphabet? How could that information be passed on?

The brilliant and heroic effort of the leftist intellectuals of the time, who made remarkable progress under those circumstances, clashed with the insurmountable walls of a new imperial system and the centuries old experience of the ruling classes to keep the peoples oppressed, exploited, confused and divided.

The only property right known by most Cubans before 1959 was the right of the big foreign companies and their allies of the national oligarchy to own enormous amounts of farmland in our country, as well as the country’s natural resources and biggest factories, the crucial public services, the banks, the storage facilities, the ports, the hospitals and the private schools that served with excellence a negligible minority of privileged population.

As fate would have it, I was honored to be born precisely in the territory of this province, in a place that is 33.5 miles in a straight line from this Plaza, but which is very close to my memory, hardly ten millimeters or ten seconds from my mind.

In those enormous sugar cane fields, I could only see dozens of thousands of farmers with no land to tilt or sharecroppers paying huge rents but without any contracts to back the arrangement, and constantly

threatened and evicted by those riders of Texan horses.

In the cities, very few owned their dwellings for which they had to pay very high rents. I never saw hospitals or schools for ordinary people and their children; I did not see brigades of doctors and teachers. I only saw extreme poverty, injustice and hopelessness everywhere. The Cuban people had been confiscated and stripped of any property.

It was imperative to resume the struggle. The chains had to be broken. A deep revolution was indispensable. We had to be willing to either win or die for it. And we decided to fight.

The socialist revolution has created in Cuba more property owners than all those created by capitalism throughout centuries. Today, hundreds of thousands of peasant families own their land, for which they do not even pay taxes. Others have it in usufruct, free of charge, and they exploit it either individually or in cooperatives; they are the owners of the machinery, the workshops, the livestock and other goods. But, most important of all is that the Revolution gave the people the property of their own country. What the Revolution eradicated was the property of the basic means of production, of the financial institutions and of other crucial services which were in the hands of those who plundered and exploited the people --and made fortunes on the workers' sweat-- or that only served the rich and the privileged, leaving the poor and the black people out.

The nostalgia over their property that the leader of an imperial government might feel could be overcome by seeing that, in addition to the farmers, millions of families in the cities presently own their dwellings, for which they do not even pay taxes.

Out of a historical necessity to leave behind a legacy of underdevelopment, Cuba shares with foreign companies those productions that it would not have access to with its own technologies and funds, but no international financial institution or foreign private capital can determine over our destiny.

Nor does a single penny end up in Castro's pockets or those of his followers. No senior Cuban revolutionary leader has a dollar in a bank, or a personal bank account in hard currency in Cuba or anywhere else. None of them can be bribed. The hundreds of foreign companies doing business in Cuba today know that very well. None of our leaders is a millionaire like the President of the United States, whose monthly wage is almost twice that of all the members of the State Council and the Council of Ministers in a year. None can be included in the long list of Mr. W's neoliberal friends in Latin America who are Olympic champions of misappropriation and theft since the few who do not steal from the public coffers and State taxes steal from the poor and the hungry the surplus value of their work while killing hundreds of thousands of Latin American children every year whose lives could be saved. That is the system that Mr. W. longs to impose on Cuba as a model. His insults are unwarranted, thus, he should not complain from our tough responses.

The end of the exploitation of human beings and true equality and justice is, and will be, the objective of a Revolution that will never cease to be what it is.

The work of the Revolution has been remarkable all over the country, and huge in the dear and heroic eastern region, which was the poorest and most backward. Of the five eastern provinces, the three --Holguin, Granma and Las Tunas-- that have sent more than 400,000 combative and enthusiastic people to this rally, have attained in a few years social and human achievements unparalleled in the world.

Some data of what they had before and what they have after the triumph of the Revolution:

Infant mortality rate: before, over 100 per one thousand live births; today, 5.9, well below the United States.

Life expectancy at birth: before, 57 years; today, 76.

Number of doctors: before, 344; today, 10, 334.

Health units: before, 46; today, 4,006.

Hospital beds: before, 1,470; today, over 12,000.

Schoolteachers: before, 1,682; today, 77,479.

Universities: before, 0; today, 12.

Illiteracy rate: before, 40.3%; today, 0.2%.

Grammar school graduates: before, 10% of only 34 percent of children in school age who attended public school; today, one hundred percent of children attend grammar school and 99.9% graduate.

TV sets for audiovisual education: before, 0; today, 13,394.

PCs for computer science education from kindergarten to sixth grade: 5,563 that benefit 237,510 children.

Over 27,000 youths between the ages of 17 and 29, who had no jobs, are studying middle and higher education in recently established Schools for the Comprehensive Education of the Youth, for which they receive remuneration.

These three provinces have 62 museums, 62 cultural centers, 21 art galleries and 72 libraries.

Every child in Cuba, regardless of his parents' income and the color of his skin, has high quality health care services ensured from his birth until the end of his life. The same applies to education, from kindergarten up until graduation as a PhD, and that absolutely free of charge.

No other country in Latin America gets even remotely close to Cuba in any of these indicators. In Cuba, there is not one single child begging in the streets or working to make a living instead of attending school. Nor are there narcotics that poison and destroy teenagers and young people.

This is not a tyranny, as Mr. W. has claimed. It is justice, it is true equality among human beings, it is general learning and culture without which there is not, there cannot be nor will there ever be true independence, freedom and democracy anywhere on Earth.

Mr. W. should be ashamed to call those societies where corruption, inequality and injustice prevail, and which are being destroyed by the neoliberal model, examples of independence, freedom and democracy!

For Mr. W. democracy only exists where money solves everything and where those who can afford a $25,000 a plate dinner --an insult to the billions of people living in the poor, hungry and underdeveloped world-- are the ones called to solve the problems of society and the world, the same that will determine the fate of a great nation like the United States, and the rest of the planet.

Don't you be a fool, Mr. W. Show some respect for the minds of people who are capable of thinking. Read some of the 100 thousand letters sent to you by our children. Do not insult Jose Marti. Do not invoke his sacred name in vain. Stop using his phrases out of context in your speeches. Show some respect for others and for yourself.

The criminal blockade he has promised to tighten will only multiply the honor and glory of our people against which their wicked plans will smash, I assure you.

Compatriots: In the face of dangers and threats, long live today more than ever the Socialist Revolution!

Homeland or Death!

We shall overcome!

Versiones Taquigráficas - Consejo de Estado

Source URL: http://www.fidelcastro.cu/en/discursos/key-address-rally-protesting-and-repudiating-blockade-slanders-lies-and-threats-president?width=600&height=600

Links
[1] http://www.fidelcastro.cu/en/discursos/key-address-rally-protesting-and-repudiating-blockade-slanders-lies-and-threats-president